The Role of Faith, Values and Ethics in Strengthening Action for Nature and Environmental Governance
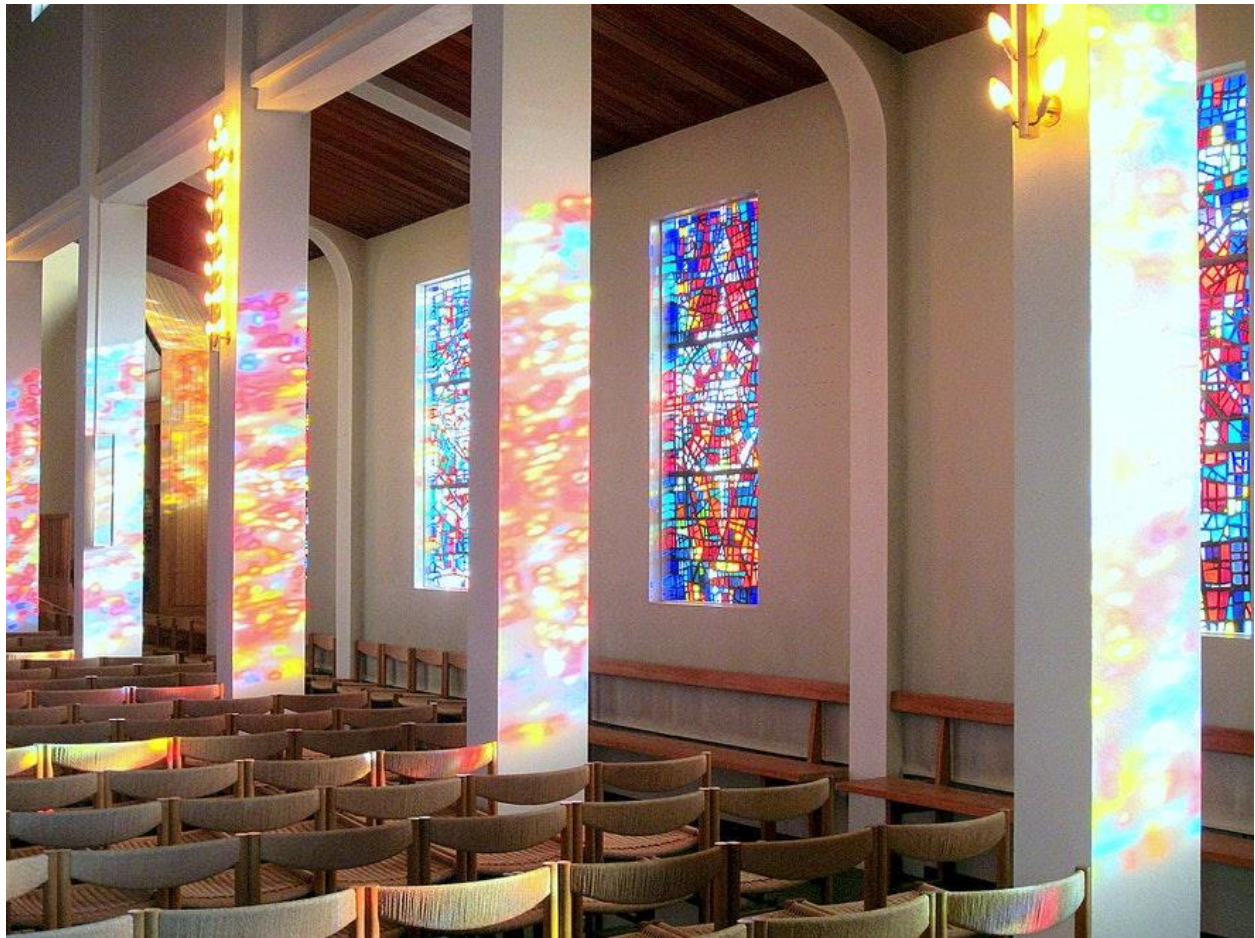
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I.   Introduction

> *"Often we forget that protecting nature, is not only about us, we also have a moral duty to protect and use wisely the planet, its bounty, and every living being on it."*
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> (Inger Andersen, Faith for Nature: Multi-Faith Action, 2020)

There are three overarching environmental challenges: climate change, ecosystem degradation and pollution. As this triple crisis continues to deteriorate our planet, it is evident that human activity and behavior towards the environment must change. Transitioning to more sustainable consumption and production practices is of paramount importance and efforts towards sustainable development must be truly global in nature. The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals provide a guiding blueprint but to achieve them requires input from the full spectrum of global society. This demands that new stakeholders are rallied and empowered to engage in environmental action, policymaking, and governance. This includes faith actors, who have long been on the peripheries of secular multinational organizations, despite their tangible contributions in core areas of sustainable development and the immense influence faith continues to have throughout the world. Notably, and this is the primary focus of this paper, faith-based organizations share intrinsic notions of moral responsibility and human rights with multilateral organizations such as the UN, with their work grounded in strong spiritual ethics. The UNFPA notes that even seemingly secular organizations are "guided by values and ideologies, not always made transparent" and often originating in religious principles and values (UNFPA, 2014).

Religious beliefs and practices have existed throughout all phases of history, frequently contributing to human development and thus the role of religion cannot be sidelined at this most crucial juncture in human history. In particular, spiritual and sacred beliefs are often a main driver of cultural values, environmental perspectives, social inclusion, political engagement and economic prosperity, all of which intersect with contemporary environmental challenges that require holistic approaches to address them. Religion is ideally equipped for this given its permeating influence in all areas of life and that faith is the analytical lens through which many view the world. Therefore, this paper argues that it is imperative that faith actors be actively integrated in environmental governance and that their invaluable contributions be recognized and institutionalized in a global UN resolution.

A.   Background

1. Belief systems, including culture, ethics, and religion, hold immense sway over both individual behaviors, and societal norms and laws. These same systems also influence humans' interaction with, and perception of the environment. This makes them important factors in environmental governance and galvanizing action, as ascertained in previous UN environmental policy. The documents highlighted in the following section (religious and interfaith statements and declarations) are instrumental in the nexus of environmental policy and belief systems and they form an important backdrop in advancing environmentally conscious agendas that include belief systems.

2. One of the most prominent forms of belief systems is religion, the focus of this concept paper. Over 80% of the global population identify with a religion (Pew Research Center, 2017). Furthermore, religion has a significant influence on personal behavior choices and attitudes, making religion a powerful tool for promoting environmental action (Pew Research Center, 2017). Numerous

declarations from diverse faith groups illustrate the potential impact of a unified global faith position and perspective that favors robust environmental policies.

Religious and Interfaith statements

3. Over the last twenty-five years, every religious tradition has made significant statements on the importance of valuing nature and engaging in positive ecological action. These statements which include the environment and climate change can be seen in the sections on each religious tradition on the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology website, which holds an almost comprehensive collection of these faith-based statements. [1] In addition, engaged projects of religious environmentalism and extensive bibliographies can also be viewed. It should be noted therefore, that the following list of religious and interfaith statements is a non-exhaustive one, and rather seeks to introduce some of the various proclamations which cemented the importance of religion in discussing nature.

4. In 2003, the World Jewish Congress released a Jewish Faith Statement. Building off the biblical expression "For the Earth is Mine", the statement notes how there is a balance between the protection of humanity and nature and implores people to protect the environment (Alliance of Religions and Conservation, 2003). The statement asserts that any solution to environmental crisis must be based upon economic, social and moral considerations.

5. In a similar statement to the global community in 2006, the Unitarian Universalist Association published a Statement of Conscience. This statement also called upon the foundations of the religion itself, citing the 7th principle of Unitarian Universalism, "respect for the independent web of all existence of which we are a part" (Unitarian Universalist Association, 2006). Using this principle, the statement links human rights to climate change under the framework of every life having value. Further expanding on the close relation between the religion and environment, the statement includes a "pledge to ground our mission and ministries in reverence for this earth", which focuses on technological ways to reduce emissions such as an increased focus on renewables, as well as advocating educational methods and tree planting.

6. This trend of religious declarations relating foundations of their belief system to environmental stewardship is further seen by the statements on climate change expressed by the Sikh and Catholic communities. The Sikh statement suggests that serving the planet can act as a form of Seva, the Sikh practice of selfless service (Interfaith Power and Light, 2014). This idea of environmental action as Seva is then expanded upon to include specifics such as reducing personal carbon footprints, recycling, eating sustainable foods, practicing sustainable agriculture, investing in renewable energy sources, and making Gurdwaras (Sikh sites of worship) themselves eco-friendly. Referencing similar environmental actions, the message by Pope Francis states that, "there is a clear, definitive and ineluctable ethical imperative to act" (Zenit, The World Seen From Rome, 2014).[2] Pope Francis then goes on to express his hopes that at future climate negotiations, "there is a dialogue permeated by this culture and by the values that it holds: justice, respect and equity". What both these statements continue to demonstrate is how vital and influential the considerations of values are in governance, particularly when considering the environment. Furthermore, the Declaration for an Awakened Kinship, at the Religions for the Earth conference at Union

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[1] The Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, https://fore.yale.edu
[2] Zenit, The World Seen From Rome (2014), Pope's Message to UN Convention on Climate Change, https://zenit.org/2014/12/11/pope-s-message-to-un-convention-on-climate-change/

Theological Seminary, declares a commitment of religious communities to join the urgent global conversation about climate change and speak on behalf of the voiceless[3].

7. Following these 2014 declarations, in 2015 the Bahá'i International Community released a statement to the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris. In this statement, the community advocates for a more balanced relationship between people of the world, and the planet (Baha'i International Community, 2015). Additionally, it calls for increased collective action to address the environment crises, as well as a redefined relationship between human behavior and sustainability objectives with a more values-based approach.

8. The Hindu Declaration on Climate Change, 'Bhumi Devi Ki Jai' was also released in 2015 and echoes the calls from the other religious statements to consider the climate crisis from a moral and values-based approach to develop a more comprehensive response. Specifically, the declaration relates the concept of dharma to ecological well-being when it quotes, "The Mahābhārata (109.10) tells us, "Dharma exists for the welfare of all beings. Hence, that by which the welfare of all living beings is sustained, that for sure is dharma." Building upon the religious values of the Hindu tradition, the declaration goes on to suggest specific methods such as reducing energy consumption and following a vegetarian diet as ways to help the planet.

9. Similarly, the 2015 Islamic Declaration on Climate Change issued a call for "all Muslims, wherever they may be, to tackle the root cause of climate change, environmental degradation, and the loss of biodiversity, following the example of The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)". This declaration again reiterates that the root cause of these issues lies in human activities and behavior.

10. The 2016 Buddhist Statement on the Climate Crisis established a connection between Earth and the Buddha's teachings. Recognizing that Paris 2015 was not enough, the statement relates the second of the Five Precepts of Buddhism, "not to steal", to the climate emergency. Humanity must not steal the lives and resources of other living beings by viewing them as merely serving people's needs (Soto Zen Buddhist Association, 2016). Additionally, the statement includes five action items including protecting the green of the Earth, not wasting water, not wasting energy, keeping the air clean and co-existing with nature.

11. In addition to religious statements on climate change and environmental stewardship, a great many publications on environmental ethics, including religious ethics, have played a vital role in promoting environmental action for at least four decades.[4]

12. Some religions have included environmental ethics in their literature in addition to climate change statements such as the 2013 *Environmental Ethics in Islam*. In this publication, the six principles of Islamic ethics are related to environmental actions people can take (Iner, 2013). Some of these suggested actions based on ethics include minimizing waste, conserving water and respecting all creatures.

13. The 2014 publication by Achim Steiner former executive director of UNEP, *Towards an Inclusive "Green Economy": Rethinking Ethics and Economy in the Age of the Anthropocene* connects green initiatives to strategies for reducing poverty and hunger (Steiner, 2014). This connection brings ethics into the conversation regarding the environment and lays the foundation for the concepts of

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[3] https://centerforearthethics.org/resources-legacy/declaration-for-an-awakened-kinship-with-the-earth/
[4] Extensive bibliographies can be found at the website of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. In addition, a focus on Ecojustice publications and action can be found on this link: https://fore.yale.edu/Ecojustice

"human capital" and "natural capital", which are described as necessities for responsible economic growth in the age of the Anthropocene. An ethical lens is thus applied to questions of socio-economic development.

14. The Earth Charter is a widely endorsed global civil society declaration finalized in 2000 that seeks to form a "sustainable global society grounded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace" (The Earth Charter, Preamble, 2016). It was drafted by one of the broadest consultative processes ever conducted and builds upon past milestones such as the 1982 Nairobi declaration, the 1987 Brundtland report and the 1986 Assisi Declarations. The formation of the Earth Charter commission in 1997 reaffirms the importance of environment in ethics and sets the stage for additional policies linking the two (Bird et al., 2016).

15. The 8th Council of Islamic Ministers of the Environment held in Rabat in 2019 adopted a "Strategy for the Activation of the Cultural and Religious Roles towards the Protection of the Environment and the Achievement of Sustainable Development in the Islamic World". The strategy reiterated the importance of adopting religious values when addressing the myriad of environmental issues based on humans' moral responsibility as vicegerents of the creator on Earth.

16. The Faith for Earth Initiative, in 2020, published 'The Role of Environmental and Spiritual Ethics in Galvanizing Nature Based Solutions'. This publication builds upon past UN environmental ethics related documents such as the 1982 World Charter for Nature, the 1997 UNEP Seoul Declaration on Environmental Ethics, and the 2000 Millennium Declaration (Abumoghli and McCartney, 2020). Acknowledging the anthropic causes of climate change, as well as the limits of technology-based solutions, the publication promotes behavioral science and ethics-based solutions to the climate crisis. The paper describes "nature-based solutions" and outlines how faith-based organizations can engage with such strategies on a large scale under the concept of a common environmental ethic (Abumoghli and McCartney, 2020). Such a common ethic is the shared belief by religions that nature should be preserved, and that environmental destruction will be catastrophic for all creatures. The publication draws upon ideas of nature-based solutions, as well as common ethics to offer a range of recommendations including leveraging religious institutions to mobilize social networks, strengthening interfaith collaboration in the field of the environment, and engaging with religious leaders through UNEP.

17. The 2020 Globalance handbook is a publication that speaks to the nexus of development and the environment, through the lens of virtue. The document states, "transformation needs also the personal ethical conviction and inner spiritual motivation" (Stuckelberger and von Weizacker, 2020). This statement, among others highlights the necessity for ethics and other belief systems to be considered when addressing current disbalances in development, particularly in a post-covid world context.

18. In addition to publications building a precedent of considering ethics in environmental governance, decisions and strategies, a series of UN resolutions also recognize different forms of belief systems as valued contributors to the discussion on environmental policy. All these resolutions acknowledge the inherent inequality that lies at the heart of many environmental issues, with social and economic underpinnings, emphasizing that the challenges also have moral, as well as environmental, ones.

Relevant UN Resolutions

19. The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) *Resolution 4.10, Innovation on Biodiversity and Land Degradation* addresses the 2030 Agenda by stressing the immense challenges of desertification, land degradation and ecosystem loss. The resolution recognizes climate change as

a major source of these issues and notes the disproportionate impact on the poor, Indigenous communities and women. This resolution calls for member states to increase commitments, implement voluntary targets and undergo assessments as well as encourage private-sector involvement and UNEP support. It also calls for the application of NBS for the sustainable and resilient coexistence of humans and wildlife to improve livelihoods and embed values of environmental protection amongst communities.

20. UNEA *Resolution 4.17, Promoting Gender Equality and the Human Rights and Empowerment of Women and Girls in Environmental Governance*. This is an example of ensuring that critical social issues, informs environmental policy initiatives. The resolution draws upon the 2030 agenda and resolutions from the UN Human Rights Council and Rio Conventions to show that women and other vulnerable populations are at greater risk because they are more exposed to environmental hazards, high stress environments, increased rates of poverty, low access to health care. The resolution asserts that women as a group are a largely untapped potential in enacting policy changes. This implies that there is both a moral imperative and practical dimension to include women and other marginalized groups in spaces they are often absent, capture the invaluable contributions they can make in this field. The resolution calls for states to prioritize gender policies and inform UNEA of their progress. Additionally, the resolution calls for UNEP to collect data and collaborate with other UN agencies to further the agenda of increased gender representation in environmental policy as well as placing a higher priority on vulnerable populations. Essentially, the resolution clarifies that social and ethical issues are intertwined with environmental policy and offers actions to integrate the two, furthering both agendas. Something similar using belief systems to inform environmental actions would further increase the potential of effective environmental policy.

21. UNEA Resolution 4.18, The Poverty and Environment Nexus relates the idea of "natural capital" to poverty as many people depend directly on land for their livelihoods and natural resources can be viewed as a social good, even as a human right. This resolution also calls for increased involvement of women in environment issues, in addition to increased access to sustainable sources of energy and innovation.

22. An example of a resolution that effectively uses religion as the basis for action from UN member states is the UN Human Rights Council's 2008 *Resolution 7/19, Combating Defamation of Religions*. This resolution calls upon past events such as the 2005 World Summit Outcome, which emphasized states responsibility to respect human rights, as well as a declaration adopted at the 34th session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministries condemning Islamophobia. Using these, as well as a call from the President of the General Assembly in March 2006 noting that, "there is need for dialogue and understanding among civilizations, cultures, and religions." The resolution calls for states to adopt initiatives that promote cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue. The resolution also uses the established issues surrounding religious defamation to request the High Commissioner for Human Rights to submit a study that complies with relevant legislation. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that this resolution was passed with some level friction as some viewed it as prioritizing religious rights over human rights, which in certain instances are contradictory.

23. UN Human Rights Council's Resolution 16/18, *Combating Intolerance, Negative Stereotyping and Stigmatization of, and Discrimination, Incitement to Violence and Violence Against, Persons Based on Religion or Belief,* was adopted in 2011 and represents an important step forward in international efforts to confront intolerance based on religion or belief. The Istanbul Process was subsequently set up as the dedicated mechanism following up the implementation of the 16/18 Resolution action plan.

24. The various General Assembly resolutions on the *Rights of Indigenous People* (starting in 1991) also provide valuable guidance about the role of belief systems in leveraging environmental policy. The recent 2020 resolution (A/75/475) begins by affirming the past resolutions on the topic and recalling the outcome document that asserts the UNs duty to protect Indigenous people's rights. It also expresses concerns regarding COVID-19 and increased xenophobia and racism resulting from the pandemic. This resolution further notes that the General Assembly reaffirmed the importance of Indigenous peoples' religious and cultural sites. Further, the resolution recognizes indigenous knowledge as a method to combat climate change and promotes the inclusion of Indigenous people in decision making processes.

25. The 1992 General Assembly *Resolution 47/135, Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to the National or Ethnic Religious and Linguistic Minorities* similarly focuses on human rights and the necessity of both member states and UN agencies to contribute to creating a more just world. This resolution reaffirms the UN charter's commitment to human rights and takes inspiration from Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that entered into force in 1976 to affirm the rights of people belonging to minorities. The resolution stipulates that States are to take measures to offer opportunities for minorities to practice their own religion and culture and speak their own languages. This focus on protecting culture and religion indicates their importance in society and reaffirms the need to use culture and/ or religion to help inform environmental policy ideas.

26. The *Resolution 65/5* adopted in 2010 by the General Assembly as part of the World Interfaith Harmony Week is recognizing "the imperative need for dialogue among different faiths and religions to enhance mutual understanding, harmony and cooperation among people" and recalling "with appreciation various global, regional and subregional initiatives on mutual understanding and interfaith harmony".

27. In 2018, the UN General Assembly adopted *Resolution 72/277, Towards a Global Pact for the Environment*, under which an open-ended working group was established to consider a technical and evidence-based report identifying and assessing possible gaps in international environmental law and environment-related instruments with a view to strengthening their implementation (UNEP 2021, Implementation of General Assembly 73/333). This led to the approval of a set of recommendations endorsed by *Resolution 73/333* addressing among other things the strengthening of environmental law and governance.

28. The Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (UN-IATF) was established in 2010 as a "platform for knowledge exchange and management, capacity building, system-wide guidance and oversight regarding engagement with faith-based and faith-inspired civil society actors" (UN-IATF Annual Report, 2020). Bringing together 27 UN agencies that meet on regular basis and co-organize advocacy and capacity-building activities. The UN-IATF has succeeded in establishing a momentum of collaboration with a wide range of faith-based organizations and civil society partners. More recently in 2018, the Multi-Faith Advisory Council (MFAC) was created which involves 45 religious leaders and heads of faith-based organizations seeking to provide support and strategic advice on thematic priority areas identified by the UN-IATF, and the environment – including forests, climate change and resource efficiency – being one of them.

B.   Objectives and Approach

1. This paper seeks to highlight the importance of belief systems in inspiring lasting change in behavior both on an individual and collective level that has great potential to preserve the environment. Noting existing work being done in the field of faith and environment, we strive to empower this movement by institutionalizing the concept of faith-based environmental action. The need for this more defined field of work is examined through reviewing the role of faith, ethics, values, and culture in environmental governance and focusing on the role of faith in restoring nature as a method to meet UNEP's MTS and POW and contribute to UNEA 5.

C.   Promoting Environmental Action Inspired by Belief Systems at UNEP

"It is time to focus the full transformative power of faith, the love, the respect and the wisdom inherent in faith teachings, onto creating a greener, a fairer and more sustainable world."

(Inger Andersen, Faith for Nature: Multi-Faith Action, 2020)

Faith for Earth: supporting a world where everything is in balance

UN Environment Strategy for Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations published in January 2018 acknowledges the role Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) have in eradicating poverty, improving people's health, protecting the environment and consequently achieving sustainable development (UNEP 2018, Engaging with faith-based organizations). For decades, FBOs have been engaged in conserving the environment, operating at global, regional and local levels on a wide range of issues, such as climate change, energy conservation, preservation of biodiversity, and reforestation, among others. The strategy supports an integrated approach which encompasses religious and cultural values. It aims to reach effective "inclusive green and transformative development through adopting lifestyles that are informed by faith-based values and behaviors to achieve sustainable consumption and production" (UNEP 2018, Engaging with faith-based organizations).

As part of this strategy, the **Faith for Earth initiative** was launched with the ambition to "Encourage, Empower and Engage with FBOs as partners, at all levels, toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and fulfilling Agenda 2030" (UNEP 2018, Faith for Earth Initiative). Promoting a vision of a *world where everything is in balance,* the strategy seeks to achieve three overarching goals: empowering faith-based leaders and communities for a sustainable impact, promoting and mobilizing green faith-based assets and investments, and providing knowledge and faith-science evidence to support powerful spiritual messages (UNEP 2018, Faith for Earth Strategy). Through the creation of networks, remote local communities close to environmental resources and served by faith actors can connect, be provided with knowledge and resources, and share good practices. Concurrently, Indigenous and cultural knowledge should be considered as of utmost importance in achieving sustainable management of environmental resources, and the involvement of young people and women in local communities should be guaranteed to ensure an inclusive and participatory process (UNEP 2018, Faith for Earth Strategy).

The interconnection of the environment, religion and culture was featured during the **Second International Seminar on Environment, Culture and Religion – Promoting Intercultural**

Dialogue for Sustainable Development, in Tehran in 2016. Exploring this nexus helps to explain the role of both culture and religion can serve in the preservation of the environment, and eventually contributing to the implementation of the SDGs (UNEP 2016, Environment, Religion and Culture in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development). Among the recommendations expressed in the seminar's report, religious scholars are encouraged to engage in dialogue amongst themselves but also with the scientific community to support faith-science evidence and knowledge. This will encourage guidance for sustainable development "that addresses the moral, ethical, spiritual, and practical responses needed to transform the paradigm for a shared destiny". Attention is drawn to building multi-stakeholder partnerships in order to encourage religious, cultural, scientific, and secular communities to cooperate, dialogue and engage together in implementing the SDGs. Furthermore, governments are encouraged to effectively embrace the "notion of unity in diversity", through supporting approaches and adopting policies or practices in accordance with cultural and religious diversity, ensuring the rights of Indigenous communities and minorities (UNEP 2016, Environment, Religion and Culture in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development).

The Faith for Earth Coalition: inspire, empower and strengthen action

The Faith for Earth Coalition is being developed as a global platform which facilitates cooperation and collaboration with and among faith leaders and FBOs in finding long-lasting solutions to environmental challenges and achieving the SDGs. Building on the Faith for Earth Strategy and from an overall perspective of the faith/environment nexus, this platform aims at facilitating partnerships at every level *"to inspire, empower and strengthen action and behavioral changes towards achieving the SGDs and implementing UNEP's programme of work"* (UNEP 2020, Faith for Earth Coalition).

The Faith for Earth Coalition as a platform will comprise of four Coalition Councils:
The Council of Eminent Leaders: Composed of high-level faith leaders representing world religions, faith, and spiritual traditions.
The Youth Council: Composed of young faith leaders and members of youth movements advocating for living in respect and harmony with planet earth.
The Network of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of FBOs: Composed of FBOs with a focus on the environment or those working with (local) faith communities responding to the SDGs.
The Faith-Science Consortium: Composed of theologians, scientists, environmentalists to bridge the gap between environmental science and religions.

The valuable benefit of the Faith for Earth Coalition is the advancement of interfaith collaboration related to environmental issues. The Coalition will foster cooperation and bring together a wide range of stakeholders whose respective background and beliefs provide room for diversity and innovation around current and future environment-related challenges (UNEP 2020, Brochure Faith for Earth Coalition). Many spiritual practices and teachings echo environmental ethics concepts – among which is the importance given to the intrinsic value of nature, the continuity and intimate relation between human and non-human forms of life, the mandate to live in balance with nature, and the recognition and respect of all living beings. The Faith for Earth Coalition advocates the opportunity to *"connect the intrinsic linkages between faith concepts of stewardship and duty of*

care and environmental sustainability with governmental and multilateral duty holders" (UNEP 2020, Brochure Faith for Earth Coalition) and accordingly, to increase faith-inspired environmental action, improving the conditions of all living beings while ensuring that no one is left behind.

Faith for Earth achievements and way forward

The 2020 Faith for Earth achievement report reiterates that a value and ethics-based approach is crucial to achieve an equitable, sustainable future that ensures the protection of the planet (UNEP 2020, Faith for Earth Achievement Report). The report emphasizes that faith actors can play key roles in driving forward changes in individual and collective behaviors and consumption patterns given the influence faith has in all areas of life.

In October 2020, a global digital and high-level conference was organized by the Minister of Environment of Iceland in collaboration with UNEP's Executive Director and a range of partners including the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, the United Nations Association of Iceland, the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland, Religions for Peace, and the U.S.-based National Religious Partnership for the Environment. Decisions were taken to encourage interfaith collaboration, highlighting the importance to draw upon Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) in accordance with UNEA-5's overall theme of 'Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals' (UNEP 2021, Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly). Participants of the conference adopted a declaration, 'Our Sacred Commitment', proclaiming FBOs' commitment towards the protection and restoration of nature, and calling for the creation of the Faith for Earth Coalition (UNEP 2020, Faith for Nature: Our Sacred Commitment). Despite the diversity of backgrounds and experience of people at the global dialogue, the declaration recognizes a common sense of global consciousness and concern for the Earth.

Among other activities was the launch of *Faith for Earth: A Call for Action*, a comprehensive book co-authored with the Parliament of World's Religions and the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, reiterating that "it is time, as never before, to call on our faith, our values, our religious teachings and traditions – on Faith for Earth" (UNEP and Parliament of the World's Religion 2020, Faith for Earth: A Call for Action). The book compiles a wide range of theological perspectives and teachings on the natural world, exploring the deep connection between faith and nature and the underlying ethical dimensions. The book documents the consensus among faith traditions on essential points of environmental ethics.

The People and Planet: Faith in the 2030 Agenda policy paper was also produced following a conference co-organized by Sida, UNEP, SIWI, and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. Gathering approximately 200 participants from all over the globe, the conference was dedicated to increase and support partnerships towards achieving SDGs relying on and bolstering faith-based and indigenous knowledge, networks and resources (UNEP et al. 2020, People and Planet: Faith in the 2030 Agenda). It recommended building on four core guiding principles including co-creation, systems thinking, a sense of urgency in the Decade of Action and normative dialogue. Emphasis was placed on adopting inclusive and holistic approaches and relying on the

role of culture and spiritual capital. Calling for a move from symbolic action to coordinated implementation, the policy paper suggests that inclusion of faith actors "is part of broader cultural sensitivity in all development processes and outcomes" and that inclusive participation is fundamental component of the 2030 Agenda. In addition to this, recommendations relate to information sharing and cross-sector networking being reinforced "by fostering, leveraging and coordinating existing multi-faith spaces", and consider giving greater importance to innovative partnership platforms which currently lack financial resources.

As part of the Faith for Earth Strategy, three multi-faith working groups have been established based on the three pillars of planetary crisis: climate change, biodiversity and pollution. These working groups aim at facilitating a global interfaith action to the previously mentioned environmental issues, through engaging faith communities, mobilizing influence of faith leaders especially at the grassroots level, identifying critical challenges and providing a forum for the exchange of knowledge and good practices globally, regionally and locally. Members of these working groups are meeting on a regular basis to ensure an effective follow-up of commitments and actions as well as informed collective reflection on the global strategy.

Guidelines were published such as the 2020 Guidelines on Greening Houses of Worship which explore the concept of green buildings, their history and positive impacts on climate and nature environment (UNEP 2020, Guidelines on Green Houses of Worship). Examples of green houses of worship are taken from a variety of religious communities, such as the Eco-Temple Community Development Project led by the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) and Interfaith Climate and Ecology network (ICE), The Green Church Initiative, a program of the Iowa Annual Conference Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, and the Green Mosques Project in Jordan, backed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Environment. The Green Temples Guide and Interreligious Eco-Justice Network are great examples of interreligious greening buildings' initiatives, aimed at "empowering and inspiring religious communities to be faithful stewards of the planet" (Interreligious Eco-Justice Network 2021).

A report published in 2020 by UNEP and partners Bhumi Global, Parliament of the World's Religions and United Religions Initiative focuses on the progress FBOs have made towards achieving the most environmentally focused SDGs (UNEP 2020, Faith Action on the UN SDGs: Progress and Outlook). FBOs are described as "uniquely positioned" to contribute to the achievement of SDGs, and numerous initiatives are taken as illustrative examples of their commitment towards the natural environment and progress in delivering on the SDGs. The report highlights that "with greater coordination between FBOs and mainstream conservation groups, governments, and civil society, these efforts could be amplified." Many initiatives and nature-based solutions were developed by faith communities in favor of ecosystem restoration and sustainable agricultural practices. The report was posted in September 2021 at the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology as a "living document" with a larger database to which projects can be added as a collaboration of FORE, the Parliament, the United Religions Initiative and the Faith for Earth Initiative[5].

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[5] Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology (2021), Faith Action and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, https://fore.yale.edu/FaithActionSDG

The Faith for Earth Initiative organized a consultation process with its network of accredited FBOs to ensure that the role of religious actors is included in UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) and Programme of Work 2022-2025. This took place under the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the need to build back better. The sessions highlighted the important role that FBOs must play in helping to drive transformative change across different sectors to ensure a more sustainable and resilient future and keep in line with UNEP's objectives, notably their role in affecting behavioral changes and in driving innovative communication strategies for environmental governance. Equally focus was placed on how FBOs can become more influential in policy-making contexts. The MTS stresses that UNEP will continue to promote faith-based organizations and communities as custodians of far-reaching, value-based perspectives on environmental sustainability that speak to billions of people around the world. UNEP will operate in this regard, on the basis of an inclusive multilateralism that reaches beyond governments and supports systemic shifts, with the help and collaboration of the private sector, business community, youth groups and civil society at large working in synergy with FBOs.

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI) is an international, multi-faith alliance inaugurated in June 2017 at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo. The inaugural meeting of the IRI was organized by Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI), Rainforest Foundation Norway and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Bringing together "the commitment, influence and moral authority of religions", the initiative serves as a platform for faith leaders, Indigenous communities, governments, civil society organizations and businesses to take concerted action towards the protection of rainforests and recognition of Indigenous peoples as guardians of these habitats (Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, 2021). The Norwegian government is providing support through its considerable financial investment and political commitment to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. In the words of former Minister of Climate and Environment of Norway, Vidar Helgesen, "there is a dimension to this fight that will require a global, tectonic shift in values. It is not the realm of policy, commerce or science, but of spirit, faith and moral conviction." (Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, 2017).

II.   Thematic Approach

A.   Definitions and Terminology

1. Environmental issues are understood as relating to "the quality and functioning of the natural environment and natural systems including biodiversity loss; greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy, energy efficiency, natural resource depletion or pollution; waste management; ozone depletion; changes in land use; ocean acidification and changes to the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles" (UNEP 2016, Inquiry Working Paper 16/13). Recognizing that the number of environmental issues and their severity have grown and are causing the accelerating erosion of life on Earth, there is a clear emergency to take concerted action. Thus, in the face of the triple planetary crisis – of climate change, loss of biodiversity and ecosystem integrity, and pollution – improved

relationships between humanity and the Earth need to be forged. Bearing in mind the intricate relations linking people to their environments (Salzman and Attwood, 1996), it is relevant to analyze human interaction with and interpretation of the biophysical context as being culturally influenced. Environmental issues are therefore connected to the diversity of cultural factors which affects the way people perceive them and then seek to address them (Salzman and Attwood, 1996). Local traditions manifest this even more so as major religion can be shaped by place and syncretism.

2. The 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity defined cultural diversity as the common heritage of humanity, embodying the uniqueness and plurality of identities of societies, communities and groups that constitute humankind. The Declaration reasserts that culture should be considered "as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs." (OHCHR 2001, Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity). Culture is also acknowledged as being at the center of contemporary debates related to "identity, social cohesion and the development of a knowledge-based economy". Current environmental challenges are rooted in an interlaced set of economic, social and cultural factors as well as beliefs and perceptions which shape our interaction with the natural environment. Unsustainable consumption and production patterns driving the world today mirror many of these perceptions and social attitudes. Considering this, a (re)examination of the values, beliefs and ethics governing the relation of human beings with nature is crucial in order to address current planetary crisis.

3. Environmental and spiritual ethics can be approached as a set of norms reflecting moral values about the way humans should behave towards nature, its resources and other living beings in general (UNEP 2020, The Role of Environmental and Spiritual Ethics in Galvanizing Nature Based Solutions). Despite the great diversity of religions, all faith beliefs explore the extensive relationship between humans and nature. Although the specifics of these perspectives differ, all acknowledge the adverse impacts induced by environmental degradation, and religions and beliefs "virtually all share a common ethic based on harmony with nature and an obligation to preserve it from destruction" (UNEP 2020, The Role of Environmental and Spiritual Ethics in Galvanizing Nature Based Solutions). These spiritual ethics that relate to the environment, must now be re-nurtured, re-applied and brought to the forefront for adherents all around the globe who may have become increasingly detached from the natural world.

4. An extensive correlation between environment, cultural diversity and spiritual ethics is noticeable and acknowledging this is central to approaching the challenge of sustainable development. Religious practices, spiritual beliefs and Indigenous traditions drive cultural values, social inclusion, political engagement and economic prosperity (UNEP 2021, A Strategy for Engagement). Research activities indicate that religious affiliation affects the way people consider climate change, be it human-induced or due to forces beyond human control. It also has implications on consumption practices, on the use of natural resources and resulting greenhouse gases emissions and eventually on the willingness to engage in protecting the environment (Hope and Jones, 2014). Bearing this in mind, taking into consideration the role of FBOs and faith actors,

and relying on these belief systems' dynamics at the local level is central to achieving sustainable development.

5. FBOs are referred to as "legally registered international faith-based development and humanitarian NGOs, religious leaders, religious institutions such as Mosques, Churches and their affiliated NGOs; and independent local community entities inspired by faith principles" (UNEP 2018, Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations: UN Environment Strategy). The definition is intentionally comprehensive and inclusive so as to cover the wide range of organizations that derive inspiration, values, guidance, principles and teachings from a faith (or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within that faith) that guides their activities and operations. These FBOs can vary in their size and structure, ranging from small-scale congregations and grassroots organizations to global institutions with advanced bureaucracies, broad networks and considerable financial and human capital (UNDP 2014, UNDP Guidelines on Engaging with FBOs and Religious Leaders). Some organizations loosely rely on faith principles, whereas others are formally connected with religious institutions and there exist a great diversity of FBOs within each faith tradition. Religious leaders are considered as men and women holding an influential role within their communities and on a broader level within society who are affiliated to a religion, faith or spiritual path. Among religious leaders can be found priests, imams, rabbis, clerics, monks, nun, lamas, traditional Indigenous spiritual guides such as Elders, shamans and sukias, and lay religious leaders (UNDP 2014, UNDP Guidelines on Engaging with FBOs and Religious Leaders). Whereas traditionally FBOs and religious leaders focused their efforts on providing spiritual, social and cultural support for their members, their roles are much broader and should now include guidance on environmental action.

6. Apart from the valuable role played in understanding and shaping opinions and behaviors on the protection of environment and natural resources, religious institutions are also endowed with significant economic and outreach power. According to the Foresight Issue on Faith for Earth report, faith institutions own about 8% of the habitable land surface and approximately 5% of all commercial forests (UNEP, 2018; Palmer and Moss, 2017). In addition, half of all schools in the world are either run, managed or were founded by them (UNICEF, 2012). The same report states that faith institutions produce and provide more books and newspapers than any other network. These factors enable faith actors to reach millions of people, even in remote and underserved communities. Additionally, around 10% of the world's total financial investment belongs to them, highlighting their immense collective economic power (Palmer and Moss, 2017). Therefore, recognizing the importance of religious cultural and financial leverages "in collaboration with scientific, economic, public policy and education partners" – in tackling climate change, promoting energy conservation and the protection of biodiversity among other issues – would facilitate the achievement of sustainable development (UNEP, 2018).

7. Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) are understood as locally appropriate practices tackling environmental issues and ensuring human well-being and biodiversity conservation by "protecting, sustainably managing and restoring ecosystems" (UNEP 2021, Nature-based solutions). In this time of unprecedented global environmental degradation, NBS are essential component in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is worth stressing that many FBOs

and religious leaders are committed to NBS, advocating for a new environmental ethic based on universally shared values, where nature is placed at a greater value and deeply connected to spiritual beliefs (Abumoghli and McCartney, 2020). The Tewahedo Church initiative in Ethiopia to save hectares of forests considered as a symbol of heaven from logging or the Doha Koranic botanical garden set up in 2008 by the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, are both examples of valuable nature-based initiatives undertaken bt FBOs (UNEP, 2021).

B.   State of Work in the International Context

> *"In this time of unprecedented global environmental degradation, a new environmental ethic based on universally shared values is required, one that places a greater value on nature and connects to spiritual beliefs."*
>
> (Iyad Abumoghli, G20 Interfaith Forum Communiqué, 2020)

Interfaith collaboration on environmental ethics

1. In addition to specific faith declarations that have set the tone for increased awareness of behaviors and environmental governance, interfaith documents are exceptionally important in the field of environmental ethics.

2. In 1986 WWF-International convened its 25th anniversary conference in Assisi, Italy, birthplace of St. Francis the Catholic saint of ecology, with an important interfaith component. From this emerged the 1986 Assisi Declarations, which formed the foundation for using belief systems in environmental governance. Originally, there were five faith-declarations on nature from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism Islam, and Judaism. This pioneering conference in many ways marked the institutionalization of faith concerns surrounding ecology and ultimately led to the foundation of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. Following these proclamations, further actions by the interfaith community cemented the importance of religion in discussing nature. Notably, released in 2016, the Interfaith Climate Change Statement to World Leaders gained attention at the signature ceremony for the Paris Agreement. This statement urges governments to rapidly sign, ratify, and implement the Paris Agreement, as well as increase pledges to reduce emissions (Religious and Spiritual Leaders, 2016). The specific goal of this document is to keep the world within the 1.5 degree C warming range – something the global community is not on track to meet. The strategies mentioned in this document include both technical solutions such as transitioning to renewable energy, as well as behavioral changes using belief systems such as encouraging faith communities to reduce high emission activities. While both strategies for enacting change are likely to be needed, often they can even complement each other as suggested by the statement with a reference to faith centers using renewable energy as well as divesting from climate hurting investments.

3. In April 1995, the Conference on Religions, Land and Conservation held in a Ohito (Japan) brought together leading activists of world faiths, under the auspices of MOEA International, with the

support of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the International Consultancy for Religion, Education and Culture (ICOREC). The Ohito Declaration on Religions, Land and Conservation is a Statement was later adopted at the Summit on Religions and Conservation held at Windsor Castle (UK) in May 1995, drawing attention to the global environmental crisis and the crucial role of faith communities in encouraging people to respect nature and preserve it for future generations.

4. A valuable contribution was made from Martin Palmer and Victoria Finlay who published a book in 2003 on *Faith in Conservation: New Approaches to Religions and the Environment.* Martin Palmer founded the aforementioned Alliance of Religions and Conservation and is a pioneering figure in the faith/ecology nexus that sought to examine how the values of religion can effect environmental care. Exploring the ecological worldviews of the main world religions, the authors reflect on religions' capacity to shape effective environmental governance. Palmer and Finlay measure the great potential of partnership between religious organizations and environment and development-focused organizations in developing alternative models of conservation approaches. Referring to faiths' core statements on environment and conservation as well as to world's religions reach power, the authors demonstrate the importance of considering faith actors as influential and effective partners (Palmer and Finlay, 2003).

5. The Interfaith Rainforest Statement of 2019 is another powerful example of how religion and ethics can influence environmental action. Rainforests are essential for biodiversity and play an important role as carbon sinks in the global carbon cycle. As described in the statement, a loss in biodiversity and deforestation also directly contributes to poverty and loss of livelihoods and cultural practices. One way to mitigate this impact is to involve faith-based actors in efforts to end deforestation. This is, as the statement notes, "a profound moral responsibility" for both people and planet. The statement calls for several actions to help protect the rainforests including, educating about the ethical, scientific, and moral reasons to end deforestation, calling upon places of worship to take action, and advocating for policies that protect the rainforest. Echoes of these calls to action are also seen in the 2020 Interfaith and Water and the 2020 Interfaith Biodiversity statements.

6. Furthermore, the 2020 document, A Call to Action, by the Interfaith Forum Recommendation for the G20 Summit builds upon actions taken by the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative to provide principles for protecting the planet with similar values. The call to action includes four governing principles; 1. Increased engagement of religious actors 2. Formal status of the engagement group to the G20 interfaith actors 3. A Renewed focus on vulnerable communities and peace 4. Priority attention of religious groups in COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

7. According to behavioral science research, "even small, subtle, and sometimes counter-intuitive changes to the way a message or choice is framed, or how a process is structured, can have an outsized impact on the decisions we make and the actions we take"[6]. Behavioral science publications support the faith declarations in understanding how belief systems are important behavioral change factors towards the environment. The 2019 study on Behavior Change for Nature emphasizes the need for behavioral change when it comes to protecting the environment

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[6] 'Behavioral insights at the United Nations, Achieving Agenda 2030', UNDP, December 2020

and highlights how impactful faith can be in enacting such changes. Drivers of behavior, such as religion, are increasingly recognized as essential in causing daily changes in attitudes and conduct.

8. Some of these concepts are further elaborated upon in the 2019 document **Behavior Change Towards a Sustainable Lifestyle**. The paper describes how psychological barriers, such as beliefs and values, can encourage people to behave in ways that reduce climate change. The paper then goes on to show that environmentally significant behaviors such as activism, financial support, or individual actions are influenced by attitudes, beliefs, and norms using frameworks from the "theory of planned behavior" and "value-belief norm theory of environmentalism". Some of the topics covered in this paper are also similar to a 2021 report by the Cambridge Sustainability Commission on Scaling Behavior Change (Newell et al., 2021). The Cambridge report, however, examines how contributions towards behavior change could help attain the goals set by the Paris Agreement.

9. In 2015, around 140 faith-based organizations and religious leaders, the World Bank and UN officials launched a call to action to 'Ending Extreme Poverty: A Moral and Spiritual Imperative'. On this occasion, the critical role of faith organizations together with other development partners in eradicating extreme poverty and achieving the SDGs were highlighted. FBOs have long been actively involved in humanitarian efforts to address poverty and share intrinsic notions of moral responsibility with multilateral institutions.

Member States' commitment to behavior change

1. Member States also stand as fundamental actors and catalysts for religious commitment towards environmental protection. This can be through supporting organizations, research and dialogues within the faith/environment nexus.

2. The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is a great example of an entity bringing together governmental and intergovernmental institutions, along with various secular civil society organizations and FBOs. Together, they aim to engage the social capital and capacities of faith communities to ensure sustainable development and humanitarian assistance in keeping with the 2030 Agenda. PaRD forges and uses synergies with existing networks and initiatives to contribute towards a more coherent, inclusive and effective international agenda on religion and development (International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, 2021).

3. The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI) supported by Norway is an international, multi-faith alliance which aims at bringing "moral urgency and faith-based leadership to global efforts to end tropical deforestation" (Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, 2021). The initiative launched in 2017 at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo initially brought together Indigenous, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, and Taoist religious leaders, as well as climate scientists, rainforest experts and Indigenous peoples' representatives to discuss its objectives. The IRI provides a platform for engaging religious leaders with other stakeholders including Indigenous peoples, civil society organizations, governments, and business, to ensure rainforest protection and support Indigenous peoples' rights and sovereignty.

4. Another illustrative example of Member States' contribution is the KAICIID Dialogue Center, an intergovernmental organization set up by the Republic of Austria, the Kingdom of Spain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Holy See as a founding Observer. The organization leads policy makers, religious leaders and followers from various faith traditions to work together on a wide range of social, environmental and humanitarian issues. The organization provides capacity building, workshops and training while encouraging the foundation of new partnerships consisting of diverse stakeholders (KAICIID Dialogue Center, 2021).

5. Religions for Peace, a global movement made up of interreligious councils, interfaith women and youth networks working on different levels, has defined six key priorities inclduing protecting the environment. Recognizing the intimate relation linking all forms of life and communities, Religions for Peace is committed to "nurture a sustainable environment" (Religions for Peace, 2021), contributing in this respect to SDGs 12, 13, 15 and 17. Among other activities, the 'Faiths for Earth' campaign led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu managed to bring together religious adherents from a wide range of faiths, urging political leaders to engage in full renewable energy by 2050. Over 1.8 million signatures of the petition were gathered from around the world and eventually presented to the former French president François Hollande on COP21 in Paris. Religions for Peace also initiated a partnership with religious and scientific experts to create a unique, multi-religious Resource Guide on Climate Change for Religious Communities (Religions for Peace, 'Sustainable Environment', 2021).

6. The Beliefs and Values Programme (BVP) was launched in 2019 with the support of the Swedish Water House under WWF's Global Governance Practice. It consists of a network-wide learning platform aimed at sharing experiences of WWF's work alongside long-term partners such as the Alliance of Religion and Conservation (ARC), with other faith partners. The twofold goal is to ensure the integration of faith partners and their unique approaches into country strategies, and to promote the extensive role of faith actors in key issues such as climate change, energy conservation and reforestation (Swedish Water House, 2020). The BVP engages with faith partners on a wide range of activities, including "direct partnership on conservation projects, political advocacy, and faith-based finance, where the scale and influence of religious action can help achieve priority conservation targets". The programme supports the integration of a values-based approach into WWF's conservation efforts, through the engagement with faith leaders and communities "based on their own spiritual, religious and cultural beliefs and value systems" (Swedish Water House, 2020).

7. The activities of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), an international non-profit organization emanating from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, are punctuated by Islamic Conferences of Environment Ministers during which the role of religious actors and cultural factors in protecting the environment and ensuring sustainable development is discussed (8th Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers, 2019). Another example of Member States' significant role is the Government of Iceland which both hosted and financially supported the Faith for Nature: Multi-Faith Action conference October 2020, making Iceland the central hub of discussion about faith action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Icelandic government has committed additional support for another such conference, as well as in supporting the Faith for Earth Coalition.

8. Finally, Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Religion or Belief are assigned by some governments to conduct fact-finding missions on human rights related issues. In the Report on 'Safeguarding Freedom of Religion or Belief for the Successful Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', the Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed points out the importance of "safeguarding freedom of religion or belief for all for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (Report of the Third Committee (A/74/399/Add.2), 2020). Exposing how people belonging to religious or belief minorities are at risk of "being left behind", he introduces a set of indicators to "operationalize international standards on freedom of religion or belief" and requests States to "adapt the indicator framework to their own country situations to identify protection gaps and formulate measurable and timebound steps to close such gaps." (Report of the Third Committee (A/74/399/Add.2), 2020).

C.   Examples of Behavioral Change Potential of Faith for Environment Benefit

1. One example of a movement seeking to capitalize on the behavioral change potential of faith for environmental benefit is the **Catholic Laudato Si' movement** (*Laudato Si: Care for Our Common Home*). The Laudato Si declaration includes a call to action by the Pope that appeals for "a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet". The encyclical proceeds to root this change in Christian principles by using the idea of the inherent worth of each person and of all creation and argues for caring and protecting the environment along with social justice. The encyclical and the Laudato Si' movement illustrate the continued need for a more established connection between religion and environmental action.

2. Another movement that combines religion and environmental action is the **Al Mizan movement**, involving many diverse Muslim organizations working for environmental harmony. The 2021 Al Mizan concept note begins this task by calling for increased collaboration between religious groups and scientific institutions. Al Mizan is building upon strategies approved at the 8th Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers to provide a "covenant", or inclusive Islamic platform that promotes environmental issues through an Islamic lens. Al Mizan seeks to contribute to sustainable development knowledge bases from an Islamic perspective as well as foster religious dialogue on the issue of the environment, promote scientific exchange, and highlight initiatives that focus on the intersection of faith and the environment. Ultimately, it hopes to catalyze a shared environmental ethic amongst the world's nearly 2 billion Muslims from all different denominations.

3. In addition to these movements specific to Catholicism and Islam, there are also a number of interfaith documents that exemplify how to integrate belief-systems with environmental action. Among others previously mentioned, the signature document of the Parliament of the World's Religions, "Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions" was expanded in 2018 to include a Fifth Directive on "Commitment to a Culture of Sustainability and Care for the Earth, indicating that the interfaith movement is affirming the need to consider ethics in environmental governance. The original declaration was adopted at the centenary Convening of the Parliament in 1993 and was endorsed by more than 200 spiritual leaders. While faith inspired environmental ethics may be grounded in the unique teachings of different religions, they share a universal acknowledgment of the inherent dignity and worth of nature. In the Parliament's Global Ethic specific religious proclamations are avoided to ensure that the statement is truly universal. The declaration focuses on the interdependence of living beings

and the Earth, and states that "we must act with love and compassion, and for justice and fairness – for the flourishing of the whole Earth community" (Parliament of the World's Religions, 2018).

III. Next steps: Building Momentum

1. Belief systems, including faith and ethics, are instrumental to enacting behavioral change that could be invaluable in efforts to prevent, halt and reverse environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. Building upon the momentum of the existing literature, this document seeks to increase recognition of ethics, faith and spirituality in environmental governance. Religious leaders, youth movements and scientific engagement are building a platform that can be harnessed to create meaningful environmental policies that capitalize on the power of faith, ethics, and religion. With this in mind, the Faith for Earth Initiative seeks to empower identified stakeholders and take the lead in mobilizing action and catalyzing efforts from all around the globe to build momentum. This would culminate in the adoption of a global resolution, integrating and institutionalizing the role of faith actors in environmental governance.

2. One of the religious leaders helping pave the way for a more established faith-environment movement is Patriarch Bartholomew. In his statement to the Interfaith Summit on Climate Change Patriarch Bartholomew noted the promise of so many people noting the urgency of climate change. He also advocates for recognizing the "connection between religion and the environment" and holding each other accountable for our actions and the path they put us on (Interfaith Summit on Climate Change, 2014). In this message to the UN Convention on Climate change, Pope Francis, another leading actor of the faith-based environment movement expressed his desire that during subsequent climate summits, "there is a dialogue permeated by this culture and by the values that it holds: justice, respect, and equity" (Laudato Si, 2015).

3. Other eminent leaders in the religious community that have furthered the religious environment movement include Her Holiness Mata Amritandamayi (Amma) and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. In her statement titled "Things won't work if we wait for others to change. Be the change", Amma urges action to preserve nature for the benefit of future generations and stresses the interconnectedness of the world we live in.[7] Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmed Eltayeb has called for "serious action" to be taken in response to climate change. The involvement of prominent religious leaders such as Pope Francis, Patriarch Bartholomew, Amma, and Imam Al-Azhar is indicative of increasing awareness among religious leaders of the influence they can exert to help the environment and mobilize millions to action. However, eminent religious leaders are not the only important voices speaking out against climate change.

4. Youth movements, such as the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESA) and UNEP's Global Youth for Environment (GYfE) are embracing religion and faith as an avenue to environmental change. CYNESA, was created in response to St. Pope John Paul II's 1990 World Day of Peace message and currently has numerous projects such as a climate change toolkit, wildlife conservation, and a multi-faith training for women's advocacy. GYfE is described as, "a space for children and youth to engage meaningfully in environmental governance and conservation processes across the UN system". GYfE is also contributing to the faith-environment movement through an Environment and Faith Working Group, where volunteers from

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[7] Excerpt from Amma's Message at the Summit of Conscience for the Climate in Paris organized by the Special Envoy for the Protection of the Planet of French President François Hollande

any faith tradition work closely with partners, including the UNEP Faith for Earth initiative, to advocate for "meaningful community-based climate actions". The Youth Environment Assembly (YEA) was self-organized in February 2021 by the Children and Youth Major Group, gathering representatives from children and young organizations from all around the world. Participants had the opportunity to reflect on different topics among which capacity-building on engaging with Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA) UNEA-5, Stockholm +50, COVID-19 and green recovery, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and other emerging issues. The YEA seeks to enhance capacity-building among youth community and to deliver a great platform for knowledge sharing and networking. Youth movements hold immense sway over the future of the environment, making their involvement in the faith-environment community especially poignant.

5. Furthermore, the academic sector is also gaining traction when it comes to harnessing faith for environmental action. The Yale Forum for Religion and Ecology has been at the forefront of developing religion's contribution to ecology since its foundation in 1998. A wide range of events have been organized since then, catalyzing action towards preserving, protecting, and restoring the Earth community. The 2008 'Renewing Hope' Conference gathered eco-theologians and leading scholars of the world's religions to discuss the various roles of religion in encouraging ecological awareness and environmental activism. In 2016, the 'Religion, Ecology, and Our Planetary Future' Conference was co-organized closely with the Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR), marking the twentieth anniversary of the Religions of the World and Ecology Conference series at Harvard and subsequent book publications. This has greatly contributed to the advancement of scholarship and teaching linking religions and ecology. In 2018, the 'Living Earth Community: Multiple Ways of Being and Knowing' publication marked the release of a collection of conference papers, recognizing "the value of indigenous, artistic, and modern ecological ways of knowing in which organic interconnectivity is acknowledged and affirmed" (Grim and Tucker, 2020). This anthology of essays by scholars from across multiple academic disciplines focuses on the different ways of being in the world and the different kinds of knowledge they entail, all of which can be galvanized for environmental action.

6. Princeton's **Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination** created a program on Religion, Diplomacy, and International Relations (PORDIR) in 2006, exploring the impact of religious beliefs and traditions on "international diplomacy, power politics, crisis and conflict management, and other activities of state and nonstate actors" (Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination, PORDIR, 2021). The **Abrahamic Programs in the Middle East/North Africa Region** co-organized by the University of Connecticut, Al Akhawayn University and the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology supported the contribution of Abrahamic traditions in the nature-society nexus in achieving environmental sustainability and supporting long-term workable solutions. The Center of Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary offers four core interconnected programmes on Eco-Ministry, Environmental Justice and Civic Engagement, Original Caretakers and Sustainability and Global Affairs. Relying on the intersection of values, ethics and ecology to tackle the climate crisis, the Center of Earth Ethics seeks to reinforce the public consciousness for paradigm shifts in order to establish a new value system which is sustainable both for the well-being of people and of the planet.

7. This paper, by building on the existing synergies between faith values, ethics and global environmental change, seeks to catalyze and encourage the recognition of faith-based action in achieving sustainable development. It acknowledges the engagement of religious organizations and leaders, the essential contribution of Member States in supporting the role of ethics and spirituality in the face of global environmental change, as well as the great potential for eminent leaders, youth movements and scientifically guided institutions in enhancing it. Such a movement would benefit

from being substantially integrated into the UN system by adopting a resolution on behavioral change potential of faith for environmental governance and sustainability. This paper has therefore sought to outline why a resolution on the value of embedding faith and spiritual ethics, alongside environmental norms, is urgently required for sustainable development.

IV. Possible Developments and Way Ahead

A. Possible short-term developments

1. Establishment of Faith for Earth Coalition, providing the needed capacity and financial resources to achieve its goals
2. Recognition of FBOs as central actors and interlocutors (among Major Groups and Stakeholders)
3. Promoting education around the role of environmental and spiritual ethics in tackling environment issues and facilitating the achievement of SDGs global environmental governance
4. Enhancing awareness around the role social and of behavioral sciences in global environmental governance and the achievement of Agenda 2030
5. Organizing a global workshop on the contribution of faith and values ethics in environmental governance (and regional workshops looking in diverse socio-cultural dimensions at the grassroots and local level)
6. Organizing a Science Faith Forum (relying both on the natural sciences and the human sciences for truly interdisciplinary approaches to tackling common concerns)
7. Encouraging intergovernmental organizations to adopt strategies for engaging with FBOs

B. Possible long-term developments

1. Collaboration with other agencies or organizations among which the Center of Earth Ethics
2. Identification of best practices, initiatives in progress and possible future developments through regional approach and partnerships
3. Creating a knowledge-sharing network aimed at relying on behavioral perspective to encourage stakeholders to achieve desired outcomes
4. Enhancing partnerships between faith-based organizations, researchers, governments and international organizations to leverage the role of environmental and spiritual ethics in global environmental governance

This concept report was prepared by Faith for Earth Initiative in support of the efforts of the Government of Iceland to put forth a new resolution during UNEA 5.2 23

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