

# THE GODS, THE PEOPLE AND THE EARTH

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A better start for the G20 Summit in Osaka couldn't have happened than the G20 Interfaith Forum, which took place from June 7-9, 2019. The forum saw a myriad gathering of religious leaders from across the globe. Held at the New Hotel Otani Makuhari in Chiba, Japan, the forum happened two weeks before the G20 Summit, which was to take place in Osaka on June 28. Organized by the Worldwide Support for Development (WSD), the G20 Interfaith Forum Association, the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) and the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), this year marks the 6th round of the Interfaith Forum talks.

Key speakers included David Cameron, former prime minister of the United Kingdom, Enda Kenny, the former prime minister of Northern Ireland, and former Prime Minister of New Zealand John Key, among many others. Representatives and leaders of various religious institutions were in attendance, along with professionals from the field of media, next-generation representatives and students, and education experts to provide a variety of perspectives.

With such an impressive guest list, there was no lack of intense and in-depth discussions about how religious and faith institutions can contribute significantly to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, or more commonly known as the SDGs, for preserving the earth for future generations. Dr. Haruhisa

Handa, chairman of WSD and the co-organizer of the forum, delivered the opening and closing lines of the conference, emphasizing that the role of religion and faith in the context of peace and prosperity should not be ignored. Religion and faith can play a pivotal role in connecting people on the level of belief, a potent motivating factor which has been at work since the beginning of any institution of faith.

Of all the topics discussed, two rang with everyone—the subject of children and state of natural resources of the world. Forests, especially rainforests, play a vital role in sustaining almost all forms of ecosystems and natural cycles of the earth. From providing food and sustenance to living creatures to regulating the earth's atmosphere to make it suitable for living, the rainforests of the world face grave danger in modern times. Saving these precious resources has become a dire need, as it will be a vital component in ensuring not only the survival and progress of humans but also affect the survival of countless species that depend on these features of the earth. Religion and faith have a close relation to the natural environment, especially to forests through the concept of sacred spaces and sacred groves.

Another issue addressed was the children of the world. According to current statistics, children—anyone from age 0-14 years—make up around 22% of the world population.<sup>1</sup> Children are, simply, the future of this planet. They are also a part of the population that is easy to exploit.<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that up to 1 billion of the population age 1-17 has faced some form of abuse and violence. Children and the subject of violence against children are seldom discussed in international conferences. Protection of children's rights and strict global measures against child abuse and trafficking should be made a prominent point in any international talks. The forum discussed how religion and faith institutions could help bring about changes in this particular problem as it affects our future.

The forum concluded with the following points summarized from over two days of sessions:

- 1) Conservation and protection of rainforests must be pursued with the help of indigenous and religious institutions.
- 2) There is a need to protect and sustain the future of the children of the world.
- 3) A strict rule of law and justice is necessary for protecting the fundamental rights of any human being.
- 4) Human trafficking and slavery can only be combatted by stringent global measures.

It is said that God helps those who help themselves. Throughout history and through the modern age, there have been countless times when religion, faith and their institutions have waged wars so terrible that they have left one to wonder how can something which is supposed to provide salvation cause so much harm. At the same time, religion and faith have saved countless lives and given the less-privileged a chance at a better one. Religion and belief have an innate power to move people and encourage them to take action, whether positive or negative. One can always argue the authenticity or the logic, but religion was, is and will remain a massive part of societies all across the world. With such paradoxes, one can see that the 6th Interfaith Forum was probably a small but a positive step toward bridging gaps between faith and politics and hopefully science. Taking action now through mutual cooperation is the only step remaining to ensure the survival and progress of the human race and the planet on which we live. Divine power or otherwise, it is up to us to ensure the survival and the progress of our future generations.

[1]<https://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables/pop2.asp>

[2]<https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/violence-against-children>

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