

Inclusive Faith-based Environmental Action: The Interfaith Women Council

Overview

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Faith for Earth Coalition
United Nations Environment Programme



WOMEN OF FAITH'S ACTION TO ADDRESS TRIPLE ENVIRONMENTAL PLANETARY CRISIS

INTRODUCTION

Faith actors (this term encompasses faith leaders, faith-based organisations and institutions, faith communities, people of faith, and others) have a moral duty of stewardship and environmental care to advocate for balance with nature as an act of reverence. The call to address pollution, and other environmental challenges, is based on core values and principles like stewardship, compassion, justice, and balance.

Women of faith are key actors in environment protection, as well as inclusive governance, freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), and building resilient, peaceful societies. In recognition of this essential role in faith-led sustainability efforts, the United Nations Environment Programme proudly launched the Interfaith Women's Council, amplifying diverse voices in global environmental decision-making.

Together, they serve as a collective moral voice within the Faith for Earth Coalition. The Council advises UNEP on gender dimensions of environmental issues and works to ensure that women of faith are present and heard in key global forums. It is a space for collaboration, solidarity, and influence, not only within UNEP but across the wider ecosystem of interfaith and environmental actors.

INTRODUCTION – WHY THIS COUNCIL, WHY NOW

The climate crisis and environmental degradation continue to deepen existing inequalities, especially for women and girls. But women of faith are not only vulnerable to these changes. They are leading responses grounded in care, justice, and spiritual wisdom. The Interfaith Women's Council recognises that these women must be more than participants, they must be leaders.

The Council exists to amplify the moral and practical leadership of women of faith. It brings together diverse women from across spiritual traditions to influence environmental policy, shape global dialogue, and drive transformative action that centres justice. It is built on the understanding that achieving climate and ecological goals requires recognising how gender, faith, and environmental justice are deeply connected.



OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES – THE VALUES THAT SHAPE OUR WORK

Women Leadership: We celebrate and support the leadership of women in faith communities, advocating for their full participation in shaping inclusive and just futures.

Stewardship: We embrace our responsibility to care for the Earth as a sacred trust, ensuring that creation is protected and sustained for future generations.

Dignity: We uphold the sacred worth of every individual, drawing from human rights frameworks and spiritual teachings that affirm our shared humanity.

Gender Justice: We recognise gender equality as both a moral imperative and a foundational requirement for achieving sustainable development and climate justice.

Equity: We commit to dismantling systemic barriers and ensuring that all people, regardless of background or identity, have fair access to resources, power, and opportunity.

Compassion: Guided by the ethical values of our faiths, we act with empathy and care in response to human suffering and environmental degradation.

Intergenerational Solidarity: We honour the wisdom of elders and nurture the innovation of youth, working together across generations to foster lasting transformation.

Collaboration: We build bridges across faiths, cultures, and sectors, knowing that inclusive partnerships are essential for meaningful and lasting change.

GENDER INCLUSIVITY IS KEY IN THE TRIPLE ENVIRONMENTAL PLANETARY CRISIS

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change impacts are different for men and women due to existing gender dynamics and inequalities and like most other challenges in humanitarian and developmental spheres, women are disproportionately negatively affected.

Women should not only be considered victims of climate change but also as agents of change. To promote gender equality and women's empowerment throughout the process, involving women in decision-making for climate action is essential, as it ensures the integration of their knowledge and experiences regarding climate change. This enriches the discourse with diverse perspectives and talents.

Research underscores women's willingness to invest more than men in environmentally friendly transportation and their heightened focus on eco-friendly products. They exhibit greater awareness of energy conservation and natural resource preservation. Moreover, women leaders across industries are already demonstrating a commitment to sustainable business practices with positive societal impacts. This change can occur at all levels, spanning households, communities, businesses, and politics.

Therefore, among women within faith communities, they are often the leaders in climate solutions and in influencing community awareness as to the threat of climate change. They are also actors of local engagement and key bridges between interfaith groups.



Sourced from: UN [Gender, Equality, and Environment](#)

BIODIVERSITY LOSS

As the main suppliers of water, food and energy at home and in society, women in rural areas are particularly sensitive to changes in the supply and quality of these resources. Therefore, scarcity of natural resources due to climate change, pollution and overexploitation of natural resources means that women and girls must walk longer distances to collect firewood and water and access new farmlands. Moreover, it reduces the amount of time they can spend on 'productive' and 'self-improvement' activities, such as generating an income or gaining new skills or knowledge.

Women of faith can be instrumental leaders in defending land from environmental degradation. They matter as they can mobilize and inspire broad collective action in restoration. In addition, their leadership ensures collective stewardship and empowers their group, which is the most directly affected by biodiversity degradation.



Sourced from: UN [Gender, Equality, and Environment](#)

POLLUTION

Women are generally disproportionately impacted by exposure to chemicals and waste and have less access to participation in decision making. Women and men are impacted differently by hazardous chemicals and waste and gender inequalities exacerbate these differences. They are also impacted throughout the product lifecycle.

Women in faith play critical roles in achieving a pollution-free planet in decision making about pollution prevention, waste management and building safer environments. They have both knowledge and expertise, whose recognition can lead to more efficient, effective, sustainable, and fair waste management operations.

UNEP'S STRATEGY FOR MAINSTREAMING GENDER

UNEP has developed a comprehensive Policy and Strategy for Gender Equality and the Environment, which provides a complete gender mainstreaming policy statement and operational framework to guide the organization's work. This ensures that women's as well as men's concerns and experiences are an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of climate action policies so that inequality is not perpetuated.

UNEP's strategy takes on two frames of focus:

- Gendered vulnerabilities to climate change
Due to existing gender dynamics and inequalities, women are disproportionately affected. In our climate actions, intersectionality is an important factor to consider that women are at a higher risk of suffering the negative socioeconomic effects of climate change.
- Women as active and effective agents and promoters of climate change adaptation and mitigation
They should not only be considered victims of climate change but also as agents of change. Therefore, involving women in decision-making for climate action is essential, as it ensures the integration of their knowledge and experiences regarding climate change.



Sourced from: UNEP Gender and climate action

FAITH FOR EARTH'S STRATEGY ON GENDER



Faith for Earth Team - June 2025

The Faith for Earth Coalition builds on the recognition that the full, meaningful and equal participation and leadership of women in all aspects of the Coalition's governance and outputs is vital for achieving the targeted impact.

Positive environmental outcomes for women are one important means to ensure sustainability and, in many (faith) communities, women already provide much needed leadership at the local level through their strong engagement in voluntary and charity work that serves the spiritual and practical needs of the communities. Therefore, it is essential that all activities and outputs by the Faith for Earth Coalition incorporate and benefit from the knowledge and leadership of women, while also supporting women as they face today's unprecedented environmental challenges.

Our areas of action for our Gender Strategy:

- Institutional level: Actioning leadership
- Programmatic level: Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of identified gender actions

FAITH FOR EARTH INTERFAITH WOMEN COUNCIL

LAUNCH OF THE INTERFAITH WOMEN COUNCIL 2025

On 30 January 2025, UNEP Faith for Earth Coalition launched the Interfaith Women Council, a high-level platform bringing together 27 women faith leaders from over 16 religious traditions. The inaugural meeting, attended by UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen and Law Division Director Dr. Patricia Mbote, affirmed the Council's strategic role in advancing gender equality and faith-based leadership in environmental governance. To support its outreach, UNEP launched a dedicated Council [website](#)

Since its formation, the Council has contributed to UNEP's thematic campaigns, including the International Day for Biodiversity, and is actively engaging in upcoming initiatives for World Environment Day.

On 28 August 2025, the Council co-hosted a joint webinar with the Faith for Earth Youth Council and Steering Committee, focusing on strengthening interfaith, intergenerational, and gender-inclusive collaboration as part of the Faith for Earth Coalition's engagement with the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7).

WHAT WE DO - STRATEGIC ROLES OF THE INTERFAITH WOMEN COUNCIL

As part of the Faith for Earth Coalition, the Interfaith Women Council plays several key roles. We advise UNEP and partner networks on gender-environment linkages. We contribute to designing programmes, events, and interventions that centre women's leadership. We provide spiritual and moral perspectives in high-level climate, biodiversity, and sustainability discussions.

We also interact with other Councils under the Coalition – youth, climate, nature, and pollution – to make sure gender is not siloed but integrated throughout. Our members serve as speakers, mentors, and conveners, using their platforms to advance collective environmental goals.

OUR SHARED VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The climate crisis is spiritual, ecological, and political. And it demands leadership that is compassionate, courageous, and collective. The Interfaith Women's Council believes that women of faith are uniquely positioned to lead the transformation we need.

We stand for a world where climate action is gender-just, faith-informed, and community-driven. We are not simply advocates. We are architects of change – building a future where justice, care, and dignity guide our relationship with the Earth and each other.

MAKING OUR VOICES HEARD – ENGAGING IN POLICY AND PUBLIC ARENAS

Council members regularly participate in global platforms, from UNEA to UNFCCC. We speak at side events, engage with member states, contribute to global declarations, and co-host interfaith dialogues. Our role is not symbolic. It is strategic.

Through our networks, we ensure that climate justice includes faith-rooted gender justice. We work to ensure that women faith leaders, whether from rural parishes or major religious institutions, shape the future of sustainable development.

WHY GENDER AND FAITH MATTER - ROOTED IN EVIDENCE, DRIVEN BY URGENCY

Research shows that climate change affects women and girls disproportionately, deepening inequalities in access to water, food, energy, and safety. Yet, as noted by the Grantham Institute, most climate policies still fail to integrate gender meaningfully.

Faith-based communities, often led by women at the grassroots level, are already providing care and solutions from disaster response to conservation to renewable energy transitions. The Council exists to spotlight and scale these actions. When faith and gender are combined, they offer not only deep community trust but also powerful frameworks for justice.

Experience shows that the resilience of households and (faith) communities depends greatly on the resilience of women. Identifying and addressing both women's and men's needs, as well as promoting women as decision makers, are critical elements to ensuring environmental sustainability. It is essential that all activities and outputs by the Faith for Earth Coalition incorporate and benefit from the knowledge and leadership of women, while also supporting women as they face today's unprecedented environmental challenges.

To create a just and sustainable future, the intersection of faith, gender, and environmental action must be recognized not as peripheral, but as central. By uplifting women's leadership and integrating gender-responsive approaches into environmental work, the Faith for Earth Coalition can help create transformative change. Empowering women within faith communities is not only a matter of equity, but it is also a strategic imperative for effective climate action and long-term resilience.

OUR PREVIOUS WORK

FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF, GENDER, AND THE SDGS-2019

In October 2019, an expert consultation in Copenhagen brought together global stakeholders to explore the intersections of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), gender equality, and sustainable development. Sponsored by the governments of Denmark and Norway, and organised by the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB, OHCHR, the UN Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development, Stefanus Alliance, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights, the dialogue uncovered powerful synergies between gender, climate, and health.

Faith for Earth presented on “Climate Change and Its Impacts on Women and Religious Groups”, calling for inclusive, faith-led environmental justice. The event marked a turning point in recognising the need to engage faith-based organisations (FBOs) in broader sustainable development frameworks.

PEOPLE AND PLANET: FAITH IN THE 2030 AGENDA-2020

Held in March 2020, this pioneering flight-free digital conference was convened by SIDA, in collaboration with SIWI, Naturvårdsverket, and UNEP Faith for Earth. The event created six regional hubs across Kenya, South Africa, Indonesia, Lebanon, Sweden, and Bosnia & Herzegovina, uniting participants through virtual and hybrid formats.

The conference deepened connections between faith-based and Indigenous knowledge systems, focusing on climate justice, gender equality, and ecosystem restoration. As the African Regional Hub coordinator, Faith for Earth engaged stakeholders on food insecurity, gender-based discrimination, and the need for gender safeguards in environmental policies.

GENDERED PERSPECTIVES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA-2020

In September 2020, the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Humboldt University Berlin partnered with WECARE (PaRD) and Faith for Earth to co-host a virtual Capacity Building Workshop.

Focused on eco-feminism, sustainable agriculture, and eco-theology, the workshop explored gendered roles in ecological sustainability through faith-based approaches. Women leaders from religious communities shared perspectives on their often-underappreciated roles in ecosystem protection and climate resilience, helping reframe ecological sustainability through a gender lens.

GLOBAL LEARNING CONFERENCE- 2021

Marking International Women’s Day 2021, Faith for Earth co-organised a global learning conference with SIDA, UN Women, SEI, and the Swedish Dialogue Institute. Regional learning hubs were held in Nairobi, Amman, Bangkok, and Härnösand.

Under the banner “From the Grassroots to the Global”, the event showcased how women, religious leaders, and local actors are responding to climate emergencies. A parallel session, Faith Actors Addressing Gendered Impacts of Climate and Conflict Emergencies, provided compelling evidence of faith-based action in times of crisis and reaffirmed the need to amplify women’s voices in humanitarian and climate responses.

FAITH SISTERS AT COP28- 2023

In April 2023, the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) invited UNEP Faith for Earth to explore how their 1,900 member congregations representing 600,000 Sisters globally could support environmental policy and the SDGs. The resulting UISG Environment Policy became a key advocacy tool during COP28 and other UN events.

In October, the Faith for Earth Coalition, in partnership with Global One and Wilton Park, hosted a Pre-COP28 Thematic Consultation on Gender-Inclusive Climate Resilience. The consultation examined how women faith leaders can shape decision-making spaces, share resources, and co-develop long-term adaptation strategies rooted in their faith traditions. This laid the groundwork for a more formalised women’s mechanism within the Coalition.

LAUNCH OF A GLOBAL MULTI-FAITH WOMEN-LED CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK- 2024

Co-convened by Wilton Park, the British and Irish Embassies to the Holy See, Islamic Relief, and UISG, this 2024 gathering brought together women from 15 countries and 8 faith traditions to launch a global multi-faith women-led climate action network.

The forum focused on practical collaboration, from local project scaling to high-level advocacy. It highlighted the critical role of women’s spiritual leadership in achieving climate justice. This momentum directly contributed to the launch of the Interfaith Women’s Council in 2025.

INTERNATIONAL DAYS AND OBSERVANCES

The following annual international days and observations present the Interfaith Women's Council and the faith network with an opportunity to mobilise the momentum of the international community, embracing the annual theme of that observance while using their own experiences to contextualize challenges and opportunities.

Day	Observances/Days
11th of February	International Day of Women and Girls in Science
8th of March	International Women's Day
30th of March	International Day of Zero Waste
5th of June	World Environment Day
28th of July	World Nature Conservation Day
11th of October	International Day of the Girl Child
25th of November	International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
10th of December	International Human Rights Day

Note: this is a non-exhaustive list of suggested annual international days to mobilise the network.

CONCLUSION

This Catalogue emphasises how the faith network is strategically positioned as partners and implementers of evidence-based solutions to illustrate how women have led and can lead faith communities towards beneficial climate action. It presents a sample of the wider ongoing movement and yet, these good practices illustrate the versatility of faith-based environmental action:

- FBOs' efforts span a wide range of activities, which include global and local campaigns, policy advocacy, fossil-fuel divestment, research & citizen science, compilation & dissemination of best practices, efforts to green faith festivities, construction of infrastructure for waste treatment, and hands-on cleaning drives.
- Action against pollution is being taken across several regions of the globe, at local and global levels, and led by various faiths, including interfaith organisations, of varied sizes.
- Women in FBOs have the ability to mobilise a large number of material and human resources, especially volunteers, and are using it to deliver significant impact

WAYS TO ENGAGE

Have your project featured on the Faith Action on the UN Sustainable Goal's database

Join the Interfaith Women's Council



PARTNERS AND MEMBERS - 2025



Dr. Aishah Abdallah

Al-Mizan Co-author

Dr. Aishah Abdallah is a wilderness leader and environmental educator who conducts outdoor activities informed by the wildland ethics of Islam.



Rev. Anne Burghardt

General Secretary of Lutheran World Federation

Rev. Anne Burghardt is the General Secretary of Lutheran World Federation, and she is the first woman and first person from Central Eastern Europe to hold this office.



Ms. Atmarpit Vidhiji

Representative of Shrimad Rajchandra Mission, Dharampur

Senior renunciate Atmarpit Vidhiji is a spiritual educator and interfaith leader, who has dedicated herself to social service and spiritual practice under the guidance of Pujya Gurudevshri Rakeshji.



Ms. Audrey E. Kitagawa

President/Founder of International Academy for Multicultural Cooperation

Audrey E. Kitagawa, J.D., is the President/Founder of the International Academy for Multicultural Cooperation, the President of the Light of Awareness International Spiritual Family, the Chair of the Anti-Racism Initiative and Co-Chair of the Gender Equality Working Group of the G20 Interfaith Forum, and the former Advisor to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict at the United Nations.



Prof. Dr. Azizan Baharuddin

Official Advisor for Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, Universiti Malaya

Dr. Azizan is the Chairholder of UKM-YSD Chair for Sustainability, Official Advisor to the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, Universiti Malaya as well as Member of Majlis Kebangsaan Bagi Hal Ehwal Ugama Islam Malaysia (MKI) (2021-2023).



Dr. Azza Karam

Founding President and CEO of Lead Integrity

Dr. Azza Karam is the founding President and CEO of Lead Integrity and Professor affiliated to the Notre Dame University's Ansari Institute for Global Engagement with Religion, in the USA. She serves as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (Jordan), International Alert (UK), the Temple of Understanding, and the Parliament of Worlds.



Ms. Bani Dugal

Principal Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the UN

Ms. Bani Dugal is the Principal Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the UN.



Ms. Barbara Gardner

Founder and CEO [Animal Interfaith Alliance](#)

Barbara Gardner BA (Hons) FCA is the founder and Chief Executive of the Animal Interfaith Alliance and is also a member of the Board.



Ms. Debra Boudreaux

Vice-President - [Tzu Chi Buddhist Foundation](#)

Ms. Debra is a senior volunteer of Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation since 1989. Debra led and coordinated medical outreach from 1993 to 2013 for more than 800 projects.



Sister Gayatri Naraine

Representative of the [Brahma Kumaris \(BKs\)](#)

Sister Gayatri Naraine is a spiritual educator, writer, and speaker. Since 1980 she has served as the representative of the Brahma Kumaris (BKs) at the United Nations in New York.



Ms. Grove Harris

Director Of Global Advocacy - Representative To The UN - [Temple Of Understanding](#)

Grove Harris is an eco-justice and religious diversity educator and advocate who brings diverse grassroots perspectives to an international agenda. She currently serves as Representative to the United Nations for the Temple of Understanding.



Prof. Husna Ahmad OBE, PhD

CEO of [Global One](#)

Prof Husna Ahmad OBE is the CEO of Global One 2015 which is a faith based International NGO focussed on women. She is an Honorary Professor in Practice at the Computer Science Department of UCL, London University. She is also an Associate Professor at the Department of Arts and Law at the University of Birmingham.



Rabbi Dr Jackie Tabick

Joint President – [World Congress of Faiths](#)

Rabbi Jackie is the co-president of the World Congress of Faith and Executive Board Member of KAICIID. She serves as chair to the World Congress of Faiths, working with patrons such as Rev. Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama towards deepening religious understanding, respect and co-operation.



Rabbi Jennie Rosenn

Founder And CEO - [Dayenu Movement of American Jews](#)

Rabbi Jennie Rosenn is founder and CEO of Dayenu, a Jewish Call to Climate Action.



Ms. Karenn Gore

Founder and Director - The Center for Earth Ethics

Karenn Gore is the founder and executive director of the Center for Earth Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York.



Rev. Dr. Kuzipa Nalwamba

Programme Director for Unity, Mission and Ecumenical Formation at the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Rev. Kuzipa Nalwamba currently serves as Programme Director for Unity, Mission and Ecumenical Formation at the World Council of Churches (WCC).



Ms. Lucy Plummer

Representative to the UN for Youth Engagement, Soka Gakkai International (SGI) (Consultant to SGI Office for UN Affairs).

Lucy is the consultant on youth engagement for the SGI Office for UN Affairs and a Research Fellow at the Centre for Applied Buddhism based at Taplow Court, UK.



Ms. Meryne Warah

Global Director of organising of GreenFaith

Meryne is the Global Director of organising of Green Faith International Network. Previously, Meryne has worked with the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance where she coordinated climate justice policy advocacy in eight African countries.



Grandmother Mona Polacca

International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers

Grandmother Mona is the Founder, President/CEO and faculty member of the Turtle Island Project. She is an active member of the Healing the Border Project of the Indigenous Alliance Without Borders.



Sister Dr. Patricia Murray, IBVM

Executive Secretary of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG).

Sister Dr. Patricia Murray, IBVM, is the Executive Secretary of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), a position she has held since 2014. She is a member of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto Sisters).



Ms. Rachel Afeaki-Taumoepeau

General Secretary South Pacific Evangelical Alliance

Rachel Afeaki-Taumoepeau is the South Pacific Evangelical Region's Regional General Secretary appointed in 2019 at the General Assembly in Jakarta. Rachel has been a board member on the New Zealand National Alliance for 7 years, and the co-director for the South Pacific WEA Women's Commission for the last 5 years.



Rev. Dr. Rachel Mash

Environmental Coordinator of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa

Rev. Dr. Rachel Mash is the Environmental Coordinator of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa which covers SA, Swaziland, Lesotho, Angola Namibia, and Mozambique. Dr. Rachel is also the Secretary to the Anglican Communion Environmental Network and sits on the steering group of the Season of Creation Group.



Dr. Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati

Secretary-General of the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance

Dr. Sadhvi is the Secretary-General of the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance. Dr. Sadhvi is the President of The Divine Shakti Foundation. She is also a member of United Nations Faith Advisory Council on Religion and of The Steering Committee for Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD).



Dr. Supreet Kaur

President (EcoSikh, India)

Dr. Supreet Kaur, with a Doctorate in Economics and Honours in Psychology, resides in Doraha, Punjab, India. With 18 years of experience in teaching and administration, she comes from a family of educationists and is passionate about environmental conservation.



Rev. Susan Hendershot

Rev. Hendershot serves as the Director of Climate Community Engagement at the Center For Community Self-Help, and co-chair of the Executive Committee for the RE-AMP Steering Committee.



Ms. Veronica Raya

Senior fellow at The Center for Earth Ethics

Veronica Raya is a senior fellow at The Center for Earth Ethics. She is a spiritual leader who carries forward practices rooted in her lineage. She is a long-standing member of Cetiliztli Nauhcampa Quetzalcoatl in Ixachitlan (Group of the Four Directions on the East of the Continent).



Ms. Yukiko Yamada Morovic

Technical Director, Environmental Sustainability and Climate Action-World Vision

Since Yukiko, currently the Technical Director, Environmental Sustainability and Climate Action joined World Vision in March 2020, Yukiko has been focusing on climate action and child sensitive social protection to address child poverty and vulnerability.

PARTNERS AND MEMBERS - 2025



LEAD INTEGRITY

