

There is no conflict between our faiths and the science of climate change
By Cardinal John Onaiyekan, Rabbi David Rosen and Professor Dr. Din Syamsuddin
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Mandatory Credit: Photo by AGF s.r.l./REX Shutterstock (4849343v) Pope Francis I General papal audience at St. Peter's Square, The Vatican, Rome, Italy - 17 Jun 2015 Photograph: AGF s.r.l./REX Shutterstock/AGF s.r.l./REX Shutterstock

On Thursday, Pope Francis issued a powerful and timely encyclical on the environment, urging humanity to come to its senses and cease its reckless onslaught against God's creation. He addressed this letter not only to his fellow Catholics, but to all people of the world, asking people of different religious traditions to unite in common purpose to save our planet.

As religious figures, we too accept the overwhelming scientific consensus that global warming comes from human activity, as we see no conflict between faith and reason.

And, coming from the three great Abrahamic faiths - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - we stand together on the need to be good stewards of the earth. All of our traditions affirm the inherent goodness of all creation, and the binding obligation on human beings to protect our common home, the planet that sustains us. The Hebrew Scriptures state clearly that the Earth belongs to God alone, and that we are merely sojourners - we do not have ownership on a permanent basis: the fruits of the earth belong to all, including the poor. This ancient teaching is affirmed by both Christianity and Islam. Christians also view the world through a sacramental lenses, believing that the redemption of Christ has in turn redeemed all of creation. And Islam can be thought of as a religion of nature, with 750 verses in the holy Qur'an speaking about our responsibility to the environment and our relationship with all creatures. Islam too recognizes that everything in the heavens and the earth belong to God, and that we are mere trustees and vice-regents.

We must agree with Pope Francis that we have violated this most sacred trust. This is evident with the scandal of climate change, which comes predominantly from the relentless burning of fossil fuels to power our global economy. The path we are on is a path of destruction. If we

do not change course, the experts tell us that the average global temperature will rise by 4-6C (7.2-10.8F) by the end of the century.

The implications of such an increase would be disastrous, even catastrophic, especially for the world's poorest people. These are the people least responsible for climate change and least able to adapt to it - and yet most beloved of God. If we fail to intervene, we should expect more severe droughts, flooding, heat waves and storms. Millions of people will be at risk from rising seas. Crop yields would be expected to collapse, especially in developing countries.

Climate change is not some distant specter in the far-off future. It is a present reality, and is already strangling some of the world's most vulnerable regions. In the Sahel region of Africa, for example, recurring drought harms human welfare and can contribute towards destabilization in the region. In Syria, the most severe drought in the country's recorded history forms the backdrop of a tragic civil war. And this is the result of an increase in global temperatures that is less than 1C (1.8F) degree higher than pre-industrial levels. What havoc will 4-6C wreak?

If people cannot live in peace with the earth, they cannot live in peace with each other. Climate change on the envisaged scale will prompt major movements of people and competition for scarce resources, and the fallout could be instability, conflict and war. This would lead to greater religious tensions too. Already in Nigeria, the population displacement caused by an encroaching desert is stirring up conflict between Christians and Muslims. And the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East is one of the regions most vulnerable to drought as temperatures rise. This is the ancient land that gave birth to our three Abrahamic faiths, and climate change will make it vastly more difficult for people of different faith traditions to live together in harmony on this sacred soil.

We therefore call upon all people of all religions to unite behind this noble and holy cause, and to let their voices ring loudly through the halls of power all across the world. These voices must be heard especially in Paris this December, when leaders have a last chance to commit to a deal to reduce carbon emissions before we pass the fatal point of no return.

We believe that our different religions call us to peaceful coexistence with each other, recognizing that - despite any political disagreements - we are all children of the same God. As members of *Religions for Peace*, the world's largest organization dedicated to advancing multi-religious cooperation, we urge everyone to speak out against vested interests, narrow provincialism and cavalier indifference on climate change.

This is a great test of our time, and God will someday call us all to account for it.