

Opening remarks (Adriance), and links to media shown at the Saturday morning plenary
“The Many Challenges of Climate Change”
Orlando SED conference, 2008

Dear friends, good morning. My name is Peter Adriance, and I have the honor of serving as moderator for this morning’s session. Together we’re going to be exploring, “The Many Challenges of Climate Change”. I want to thank Rabbani Trust for providing us with the opportunity at this year’s conference to look deeply into this topic together. I know of no issue that is more compelling, more urgent, or more world embracing.

Climate change touches us all, and we all have a part to play in both helping to deal with the issue and cope with its inevitable effects. While the impacts of climate change are already being felt across the globe, our individual and collective experience with it will become more direct and apparent over the coming years and decades, and our response to it today will have implications for generations to come.

For those of us who were fortunate enough to be here at last evening’s session, we learned about the impacts of climate change on children. Caryl Stern, President & CEO of the US fund for UNICEF really gave an inspiring presentation on that agency’s role in protecting children and families from the impacts of climate change particularly in the developing world. UNICEF is on the front lines, helping to reduce infant mortality due to preventable causes. The Zero Campaign aims to reduce the number of child deaths due to preventable causes from 25,000 per day, down to zero. We learned of a number of ways that we could help with that effort.

For the last 18 years I have had the privilege of working for the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the US in its office of external affairs focusing on the topic of sustainable development. Beginning with the work leading up to the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, through the decade of the 90s with numerous UN conferences on sustainable development, my work as a Bahá’í representative has given me the opportunity to interact with the world community and attempt to influence the discourse on sustainable development.

A few years ago, in response to the approaching UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, National Spiritual Assembly was among several organizations to help found the US Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development. That was in 2003. The idea of the Decade had emerged from the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, which determined that it was essential to shed light and understanding on the rather abstract and complex topic of sustainability and to make the concept more concrete for all the world’s peoples.

Something happened in 2007 that would transform that task and dramatically notch up the urgency of educating for sustainability. The IPCC released its latest series of reports, announcing with a high level scientific certainty that the Earth’s climate systems were changing dramatically and that it was due primarily to human activity, the burning of fossil fuels. Al Gore’s movie, “An Inconvenient Truth” was also released that year. The issue received even more attention when Gore and the IPCC received the Nobel peace prize. Suddenly, climate change was on the front pages of every paper, and featured prominently in all media. If nothing else, the climate issue was making the concept of sustainability both concrete and urgent.

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The Human Development Report of 2007/8 refers to climate change as “the defining human development challenge of the 21st century.” It notes,

“Failure to respond to that challenge will stall and then reverse international efforts to reduce poverty. The poorest countries and most vulnerable citizens will suffer the earliest and most damaging setbacks, even though they have contributed least to the problem. Looking to the future, no country—however wealthy or powerful—will be immune to the impact of global warming.”

The report goes on,

“Climate change is not just a future scenario. Increased exposure to droughts, floods and storms is already destroying opportunity and reinforcing inequality. Meanwhile, there is now overwhelming scientific evidence that the world is moving towards the point at which irreversible ecological catastrophe becomes unavoidable.”

If we fail to make the necessary changes, the report forecasts,

“an unprecedented reversal in human development in our lifetime, and acute risks for our children and their grandchildren..

The report stresses the urgency of the time line that the world has to address this issue. It notes:

“There is a window of opportunity for avoiding the most damaging climate change impacts, but that window is closing: the world has less than a decade to change course...

It further points out that,

“The world lacks neither the financial resources nor the technological capabilities to act. What is missing is a sense of urgency, human solidarity and collective interest.”

It concludes, climate change,

“challenges the entire human community to undertake prompt and strong collective action based on shared values and a shared vision.”

This morning we are going to take a closer look at these issues. We’re going to explore the science of climate change, look at the responses of the international community and get a timely update on the negotiations taking place right now. We’ll then look at a case

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study – the story of how Kiribati, a small pacific atoll nation, is experiencing climate change first hand. Kiribati has a national spiritual assembly and 8% of the population there is Bahá'í! We'll learn how the Bahá'í community in general is responding to this challenge – at the international, national and local levels. By the time the morning is over, we will come away with a new appreciation of the issue of climate change and what our role might be in helping to address this compelling human dilemma.

[Introduce panel]

Quick links of the PowerPoints shown during the climate plenary (as posted on Scribd by John Krochmalny)

Arthur Dahl: The Science of Climate Change

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/9415165/Arthur-OrlandoClimate08>

Halldor Thorgeirsson: International Climate Negotiations – an Overview

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/9415151/Thorgeirsson-Panel-Presentation>

Tahirih Naylor/Bahá'í International Community: The Moral and Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/9415174/Tahirih-Climate-Change-Presentation>

Duncan Hanks: Learning to Integrate Action on Climate Change with the Activities of the Five Year Plan: A story from Canada

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/9415168/Hanks-Cdn-Envir-Actions-Dec18>

Other Resources:

BIC paper: *Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the Challenge of Climate Change*

<http://bic.org/statements-and-reports/featured/Climate-Change-paper.pdf>

PBS video: *Paradise Lost* - For many island nations like Kiribati and Niue in the South Pacific, climate change is already more than just a theory -- it is a pressing, menacing reality. (shown during the climate plenary in Orlando)

<http://www.pbs.org/shows/449/video.html>

YouTube video of Don Brown, of the Rock Ethics Institute at Penn State, speaking at the BIC sponsored side event on the *Ethical Dimensions of Climate Change*. (April 2007, United Nations)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-faBHqVu04>

An essay: *Summoning the Courage: Arising to the Ethical Challenge of Climate Change*, by Tahirih Naylor and Peter Adriance posted on ClimateEthics.org 1/11/09

<http://climateethics.org/?p=77>