

Action on Climate Change: Multiple Paths to a Better Future

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Climate change already causes much suffering today – devastating storms, floods, heat waves, droughts, and wildfires – and will increasingly threaten the livelihoods and the very lives of growing numbers of people.

The scope of its danger to human civilization, to future generations, and to the living world is impossible to grasp. However, as the warming of the Earth’s atmosphere and oceans is caused by humans, we can also do something about it!

That’s the purpose of COP26, the upcoming international climate change conference in Glasgow, Scotland, in the first half of November. Many people consider this conference a last opportunity for the world’s leaders to avert a climate catastrophe by finally coming together to take strong and effective climate action.

Of course, the world’s leaders cannot, on their own, accomplish the fundamental social change required for humanity to live in harmony with nature. We all have a role to play, as the writings of Baha’u’llah, the prophet and founder of the Baha’i Faith, clearly indicate:

The world is in great turmoil and the minds of its people are in a state of utter confusion. We entreat the Almighty that He may graciously illuminate them with the glory of His

Justice, and enable them to discover that which will be profitable unto them at all times and under all conditions.

The Baha'i teachings offer humanity hope in the face of our climate crisis, because they emphasize, as one of the primary Baha'i principles, the harmony of science and religion. The Baha'i teachings also say that contemporary civilization has made highly-developed technological advances, but has lagged behind in its equally necessary, parallel spiritual development:

... religion must be in conformity with science and reason, so that it may influence the hearts of men. The foundation must be solid and must not consist of imitations.

... although material civilization is one of the means for the progress of the world of mankind, yet until it becomes combined with Divine civilization, the desired result, which is the felicity of mankind, will not be attained.

In this spirit, the Baha'i-inspired International Environment Forum (IEF) invites everyone to its 25th annual conference in association with COP26. Anyone can attend this free, virtual online conference, with its theme of "Action on Climate Change: Multiple Paths to a Better Future," which will take place November 1-5, 2021.

During the five-day conference, five panels will explore specific aspects of climate action. Their aim: to raise scientific knowledge and to infuse the topics with spiritual and ethical principles. All are invited to attend one or more panels, by clicking on the desired panel in the calendar of the conference website.

The conference begins on November 1 with a discussion about "Health Equity and Climate Change." The issues of climate change, health, and equity are strongly interconnected. Health care professionals from different backgrounds will approach this wide topic from different angles. One speaker will talk about the "Impact of the climate emergency on children and young people's mental health." The two other topics are "Prescription for a healthy climate" and "A planetary perspective of health and climate change in the 21st century."

The second panel will discuss "Strengthening Global Climate Governance" on November 2. This event has special significance in the conference because it directly addresses the deliberations at COP26. It is also the only event that will simultaneously take place in Glasgow as well as online. The panel description explains: "While the 2015 Paris Agreement set important targets for climate change mitigation and adaptation, commitments are voluntary and implementation has fallen far short. Strengthened mechanisms of global climate governance are necessary to avoid or at least mitigate a climate catastrophe." This panel will be longer – two hours – in order to give the highly qualified speakers enough time to address their topics.

"Biodiversity: Imagining a Positive Future for Nature and Culture" will be the topic of the third panel on November 4. The seriousness of the loss of both the diversity and the abundance of wild plants and animals cannot be overstated. So far, climate change has been only one of its contributing factors, but will become increasingly more important. This panel will explore the role of values in positive futures for nature and humans, using the Arctic and coral reefs as examples.

Later on November 4, the conference will host a panel about “Engineering and Climate Change: Remaking the Future”. The speakers will address fascinating topics such as “Climate action in tech: what can a technologist do about climate change?” and “Creating collective engineering climate standards – for the good of all.” The panel description reads: “Technology is inseparable from climate change: it either accelerates it, or is indispensable to mitigating it. The difference lies in great measure in the choices engineers make. How do we ensure we make the right ones?” The final panel, on November 5, is designed to interest everyone: “Strategies for Climate Resilient Communities”. Communities worldwide will need to adapt to the changing climate in a wide variety of ways. This panel will “explore strategies concerning transportation systems, disaster preparedness and response, and unity building in local communities.” Among the distinguished speakers are an urban planner and a citizen from Vanuatu with much experience in the empowerment of local communities.

Parallel to the IEF conference, the Baha’is of Glasgow invite everyone to participate in Earth Reflections, an online program of poems, prayers, tributes, and music reflecting love for the Earth on November 3.

The day following the conclusion of the conference, November 6, is the Global Day of Action. On that day, the Baha’is of Scotland will support the Trees for Life Initiative by planting trees at the Baha’i Unity Grove, with the goal of inspiring people around the world to plant trees or take other meaningful climate actions.

The International Environment Forum gratefully acknowledges the co-sponsorship of the conference by the Adora Foundation who created the beautiful conference website and contributed in other essential ways to the conference, as well as of the Baha’i International Community (BIC), ebbf, the Stimson Center, The Coalition for the UN We Need (C4UN), the Global Governance Forum, Interfaith Scotland, and the Glasgow Baha’is. All together, we can raise our voices in public discourse from the local to the international level. If you’d like to do something significant to mitigate the effects of climate change, you’re invited to take part in the IEF conference, and to become empowered for action. Baha’is from all over the world, inspired by Baha’u’llah’s call for global unity and justice, invite you to join us.