

Working Together for Climate and Environmental Justice

ISNA reaches out across communities to work toward positive change

BY ISNA GREEN INITIATIVE TEAM

OUR SOCIETY HAS BEEN TRIED AND tested by not one, but many converging crises, among them perpetual racial inequality, public health care disparities, economic recession and the ongoing climate crisis. The cumulative impacts of environmental injustice remain troubling. Low-wealth communities and communities of color bear the brunt of these compounded crises. To create a fairer and more equitable future, we need to center environmental justice-based solutions and invest in those communities where legacy pollution has impacted the health of so many for far too long.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice) defines environmental justice (EJ) as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of

race, color, national origin or income, with respect to developing, implementing and enforcing environmental laws, regulations and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process. Only then will humanity at large have a healthy environment in which to live, learn and work.

However, this definition also needs to include the terms “faith/religion” as well as “pray/worship” to ensure that faith communities are included and have equal access to the above-mentioned processes.

The EJ movement views “environment” as the places where we live, work, play, pray and go to school. Its motto — “*We speak for ourselves*” — challenges environmental and all forms of structural racism. As a minority

faith group, we experience Islamophobia, discrimination and structural racism. Given this reality, we also must ensure that our voices are heard.

Thirty years ago, this movement was launched at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, held on Oct. 24-27, 1991, in Washington D.C. Nearly 1,000 people, primarily people of color, attended. The outcomes included constructing environmental justice as a national movement and articulating the 17 principles that have functioned as guidelines for organizing local communities and as a core document for this growing grassroots movement (www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.pdf).

One of these principles states that “Environmental Justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.”

We celebrate the establishment of the first-ever White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council earlier this year and the commitment to make EJ part of every federal agency’s mission. This historic moment is the culmination of decades of work and sacrifice by EJ activists and allies.

The Biden administration’s Justice40 Initiative (www.whitehouse.gov/?s=Justice40+Initiative+) proposes that 40% of the



overall benefits from federal investments — those related to clean energy and energy efficiency; clean transit; affordable and sustainable housing; training and workforce development; remediation and reduction of legacy pollution; and development of critical clean water infrastructure — will go to those communities that have traditionally been overburdened by pollution.

A transformative and accountable process must be formulated for the fair and just


(25:63). In modern eco-understanding terminology, live a low impact lifestyle to reduce your carbon footprint. The life of Prophet Muhammad (*salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*), sent as “*Rahmaten lil alameen*” (a mercy to the universe’s inhabitants), was rooted in a life of compassionate simplicity that reflected the ethics of restraint and conservation.

As the UN Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP26; Nov. 1-12, 2021) approaches, the reality of the climate crisis

GreenFaith International Network on Oct. 17-18, two weeks before governments are expected to increase their climate commitments, to encourage all people to rise together for global action. This event, known as “Faiths 4 Climate Justice” (greenfaith.org/faiths4climatejustice/), will send a clear message: *Destroying the planet is against all our religions, and we will not rest until decision makers — governments and major financial institutions — get it right.*

As a global multifaith community, ISNA and its partners are calling for an immediate end to new fossil fuel projects, deforestation and related financing; a massive commitment to green jobs to reduce climate pollution and end poverty for millions; and reparations from wealthy countries responsible for most past emissions to equip vulnerable nations for a better future.

Islam requires nothing less. These commitments are what the world needs and what Islam’s teaching and our faiths require. We will send a clear message to governments and major financial institutions: destroying the planet is against Islam.

Can we count on you? Let’s work together to make Faiths4ClimateJustice a big, beautiful, faith-rooted action. We are ready to act for a just and sustainable future. 

The ISNA Green Initiatives Team comprises Huda Alkaff, Saffet Catovic, Nana Firman, Uzma Mirza and S. Masroor Shah (chairperson).

ISLAM REQUIRES NOTHING LESS. THESE COMMITMENTS ARE WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS AND WHAT ISLAM’S TEACHING AND OUR FAITHS REQUIRE. WE WILL SEND A CLEAR MESSAGE TO GOVERNMENTS AND MAJOR FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS: DESTROYING THE PLANET IS AGAINST ISLAM.

distribution of 40% or more of the benefits to be invested in frontline and EJ communities. Also, Justice40 must ensure that 100% of the investments do no harm to people of color, frontline overburdened, underserved, disadvantaged, and environmental justice communities. Their needs must be at the center of any infrastructure package.

The EPA is tasked with protecting clean air, water, the environment and public health for the American public. Thus, it has the power to protect us from being taken advantage of by polluting industry CEOs and ensure that *all* communities have a livable environment. It must use this power to lead all federal efforts on climate and take the helm of the Biden administration’s historic climate agenda.

The ISNA Green Initiative Team is partnering with the EPA’s ENERGY STAR in this ENERGY STAR Action Workbook for Muslim communities (isna.net/isna-green-initiative/). In doing so, ISNA seeks to enable this nation’s 2,700+ mosques and 300+ Islamic schools to reduce their buildings’ energy, water and operating expenses, as well as emissions from transportation, and to pursue other sustainable initiatives. This joint program helps Muslim communities measure and track the energy performance of their facilities, operations and new construction projects using the ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager.

“And the servants of (God) Most Merciful are those who walk upon the Earth gently...”

is clear. Unfortunately, banks have increased their financing for fossil fuel projects every year since the Paris Climate Agreement was signed in November 2016. Governments have not met their stated goals. Severe droughts, floods and wildfires continue to afflict the world’s most vulnerable countries and communities. At the recent G7 meeting, the assembled leaders failed to commit to the timing of support for countries facing the greatest risk from climate change — despite having pledged to do so years ago. This unacceptable lack of leadership, which violates humanity’s deepest moral values, is both wrong and unjust. It is long past time for governments, banks and investors to honor their promises.

In 2016, ISNA became the first national Muslim organization to publicly declare its commitment to divest all of its assets from fossil fuel companies and allied industries. Three years later, the Fiqh Council of North America issued a fatwa that detailed the harm caused by fossil fuel extraction and burning, as well as their incompatibility with the goals of the Sharia (*maqasid al-Shari’ah*), and called for the financing of renewable clean energy solutions (<https://financingthefuture.global/statement-of-fiqh-council-of-north-america-on-fossil-fuel-divestment/>).

The urgency of this crisis and its negative impacts require bold and transformative actions. ISNA is therefore joining with other national and global faith partners and the

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