

Making Hijrah Toward Climate Justice

It's time to move beyond individual efforts

BY ISNA GREEN INITIATIVE TEAM



AS A HUMAN SOCIETY, WE ARE CURRENTLY CONSUMING MORE THAN 1.5 times of Earth's natural resources globally. In short, we are using up our natural resources faster than nature can regenerate them.

Global Footprint Network's Ecological Footprint Calculator (<https://www.footprintnetwork.org/resources/footprint-calculator/>), introduced online in 2007 and refreshed in 2017, currently draws almost 4 million users per year. It calculates Earth Shoot Day, the date during any given year when humanity's use of natural resources and services exceeded Earth's ability to regenerate them.

Humanity's footprint first exceeded Earth's biocapacity in the early 1970s and has done so every year thereafter. By 2019, the annual overshoot had accrued into an ecological debt that exceeded 17 years of Earth's total productivity. This year's overshoot day was July 29. So, due to our continued gobbling up the natural resources at an unsustainable rate, we've been living in ecological debt since that date. Americans, who make up just 5% of the world's population, consume 25% of its resources.

In the last decade, all of us have noticed the unprecedented increase in the number and frequency of heatwaves, storms, wildfires, droughts, tornadoes and hurricanes — all of which are directly related to our oceans rising due to the increase of global temperatures. Higher temperatures result in faster evaporation, and more water vapor results in more frequent and more torrential storms. The increasing temperatures are exactly why we need to make some serious changes now. It's no exaggeration to say that the changes you make right now are necessary to safeguard the quality of life for future generations and, hopefully, to save this beautiful green planet that we call home.

This year's Islamic New Year (Aug. 9) coincided with the release of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC; <http://www.ipcc.ch>) report, which lays out in stark terms the disastrous environmental impacts on the planet's natural systems and worsening extreme weather events worldwide. The news was

staggering — a code red for humanity (<http://news.un.org/en/story/2021/08/1097362>). Corporations, governments, as well as cultural and religious forces aren't doing enough, and, in many places, are actually making things worse.

While the Islamic New Year honors Prophet Muhammad's (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) migration from Makka to Madina, it's also considered a time for prayer and reflecting on the sacrifices that led to Islam's beginning. But it's far more than just that, for many Muslims view it as a constant process, mentality, philosophy and code of life — a constant activity designed to help us avoid that which is wrong and do what is right, even a state of mind. Given this reality, how can our global community put this wisdom into practice by caring about the ongoing devastation of our planet?

Muslims around the world are united by a fundamental belief that all people, living things and Earth are sacred. The Prophet observed: "All of Earth is a mosque. God has created the universe in all its splendor, and our duty as human beings is to be stewards who cultivate the greater good for all people and all His creations." Earth, as the Prophet taught, is our *umm* (mother), and we must respect, care for and protect her as we do our own birth mothers, for he said: "Take care of the earth for she is your mother. No one does good or evil on her except that she will

speak of it (on the Last Day)” (“Faydul Qadir,” hadith no. 3260; “Al-Sirajul Munir,” vol. 2 pg. 158).

But as we consider the world’s actual state, our hearts overflow with sadness and concern. Climate-induced floods, droughts and wildfires now happen more frequently, and it’s always those who have done least to cause these problems — racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, the elders, young children and women — who suffer first and the worst. There are significant demographic and geographical disparities as well. In the U.S., it is well-documented that

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communities of color suffer disproportionately from climate change-induced heatwaves and severe storms. Internationally, many of the predominantly Muslim North African countries are among the most impacted parts, despite having done very little to contribute to the current climate crisis.

Islam calls for action to both protect the environment and to oppose climate change. The Quran calls on us to recognize that God established the natural world in a life-sustaining balance, which we should both respect and protect. It also recognizes that people are responsible for all forms of human wrongdoing, including that which affects the land, sea and air (30:41).

To integrate these values into their personal lives, more and more Muslims are trying to change their consumption habits so that they may realize the following ideal in their own lives: “The servants of the All-merciful are those who walk on the earth gently” (25:63). Many of us, for example, are reducing the amount of water we use during our *wudu*, thereby following the Prophet’s words concerning the value of water: “Do not waste water even if you are at a running stream.” These words take on new meaning today.

Muslims also have started approaching Ramadan with a more climate-centric attitude. Some Muslim activists are pushing for greater energy efficiency, the use of renewable energies in their mosques, training imams and others about the importance of saving energy and encouraging pilgrims to make the hajj more sustainable.

Furthermore, we recognize the 2015 Islamic

Declaration on Global Climate, which called upon all Muslim nations to transition from fossil-fuel to clean-energy-based development and was followed by ISNA’s 2016 decision and public announcement to divest from fossil-fuel industries. We also acknowledge the Fiqh Council of North America’s (FCNA) 2109 statement affirming that the means exist to transform all of North America’s energy systems into fully renewable energy systems, as well as the call for shifting to clean renewable energy-based electric transport systems worldwide.


FCNA encourages Muslims to participate in as many tree-planting projects as possible with others, for such projects enable carbon sequestration, including reforestation and improving forest management. It also urges Islamic financial institutions to direct fossil-free investments and portfolios toward renewable and clean energy companies.

But changing one’s personal behavior and divesting from fossil fuels aren’t enough to turn the tide, for the reality is that governments, financial institutions and multinational corporations have massive power over the environment. We are alarmed by the vast gap between what is required to limit catastrophic global temperature rise and the actual climate change commitments made by these entities. After decades of knowing exactly how serious the climate crisis is, the gap between what’s needed and what’s happening is morally incomprehensible.

This November, Glasgow, Scotland, will host COP26, a major UN climate change summit that is being hailed as the biggest climate moment since the Paris Agreement at COP21 (2015). On that occasion, 196 countries agreed to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels, although preferably below 1.5 degrees. Right now, the planet is 1.1 degrees hotter than it was between 1850 and 1900. [Editor’s note: Former President Trump withdrew the U.S. from this treaty on Nov. 4, 2020; President Biden rejoined it on Feb. 19, 2021.]

The IPCC’s report is a stark warning of what might happen if COP26 doesn’t result in a serious commitment to radical action. COP26 also takes on a special significance as the fifth summit since the Paris Agreement. According to that treaty, this means countries must come with their updated nationally determined contributions (NDCs), defined as the commitments a country makes to reduce its carbon emissions. Every five years, the agreement’s signatories must put forward updated plans with the highest possible level of ambition.

Many global climate activists, among them Green New Deal (https://www.gp.org/green_new_deal) and Faiths 4 Climate Justice (<https://greenfaith.org/faiths4climatejustice/>) are calling for countries to meaningfully commit to the global environmental movement. It’s time to call upon our governments and financial institutions to admit their serious responsibilities: ending their support for new fossil-fuel infrastructure and tropical deforestation; committing to provide universal access to clean and affordable energy; supporting policies that create green jobs and job training, placement, healthcare and income maintenance for workers and communities who will be affected by this transition to a clean energy economy; and enacting policies to support those forced to migrate due to climate impacts.

At the same time, we must demand and strive for climate justice now. Such are the kinds of commitments and actions that define us as an umma, of what it means to make our hijra, which represents *adl* (justice) and *rahma* (compassion) to our planet and our fellow human beings, regardless of faith or the lack thereof. Through the Green Initiative, ISNA is doing its part and urges other Muslims to join us. 

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