

Science and Faith Unite on Biodiversity

**7 December 2007
University of Oxford**

Press Release:

We are a group of scientists and religious believers, who may disagree on some issues, but are united on one: the need for action to halt the damage that human activities are now doing to the natural world.

The evidence for such damage is solid, convincing and increasing. From the Brundtland Commission Report of 1987 to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment of 2005, and now to the recently published 4th Global Environment Outlook of the United Nations Environment Programme, it has become clear that, in the words of its Executive Director, “The systematic destruction of the Earth’s natural and nature-based resources has reached a point where the economic viability of economies is being challenged, and where the bill we hand to our children may prove impossible to pay.”

Human society is wholly dependent on the good health of the natural environment, and the wide range of services it provides. Such services include the oxygen we breathe, the water we drink, the nutrients and pollination of the crops we eat, the land we inhabit, traditional medicines, indeed our very existence. The protection of life on Earth is thus a practical as well as a profoundly moral imperative for us all.

The impact of the damage we are now doing, and its effects on human society, vary according to different circumstances; but those countries which have led the way towards our current consumer society have particular responsibilities. The prospects for future generations, particularly those who live in poverty, are bleak. Within the lifetimes of many of today’s young people, there will be critical shortages of food and water, exhaustion of some vital resources, increasing pollution of land, sea and air, and further destabilization of climate, all with dangerous consequences for society. We already know much of what needs to be done, and have the ability to do it.

Despite our differences of approach, we are at one in our belief that humans must find a way to live more lightly on the Earth and do more to protect biodiversity of the lands and seas. Business as usual is not an option. We need to think and then to act very differently, whether as individuals, organizations, national governments or global institutions. The time left for us to change direction is very short. Circumstances may vary according to country, but we need action in all of them now. Collectively we are committed to promoting within our respective communities greater awareness of the importance of biodiversity to human well-being and call on others to join us in positive actions to protect and repair the natural environment.

Signatures

Prof Peter Atkins
Lincoln College
University of Oxford

The Rev'd Charlotte Bannister-Parker
Founder
Friends of Faith

Fr Chris Boles SJ
Director
Lauriston Jesuit Centre

The Rt Revd & Rt Hon Richard Chartres
Bishop of London

Mary Colwell
BBC Natural History Unit

Prof Richard Fortey
Natural History Museum

Claire Foster
Lay Canon
St. Paul's

The Rev'd Dr Giles Fraser
Vicar of Putney

Prof Mike Hulme
School of Environmental Sciences
UEA, Norwich

Dr Paul Jepson
Oxford University Centre for the Environment

Fazlun Khalid
Founder Director
Islamic Foundation for Ecology and
Environmental Sciences
Birmingham

Alex Kirby
Journalist

David Lorimer
Programme Director
Scientific and Medical Network

Prof David MacDonald
Director, Wildlife Conservation Research Unit
Oxford Zoology Department

Prof Mary Midgley

Keith Patrick Cardinal O'Brien
Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh

Dr Ali Paya
Associate Professor of Philosophy
National Research Institute for Science Policy
(Iran)

The Rev'd Dr John Polkinghorne
Cambridge University

Prof Sir Ghillean Prance FRS
Scientific Director
The Eden Project

Prof Hugh W. Pritchard
Seed Conservation Department & Millennium
Seed Bank Project
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Tim Radford
Journalist

Dame Jessica Rawson
Warden, Merton College
University of Oxford

Prof Callum M. Roberts
Environment Department
University of York

Sir Crispin Tickell
Director, Policy Foresight Programme
University of Oxford

Camilla Toulmin
Director
International Institute for Environment and
Development

Prof Peter Wadhams
Professor of Ocean Physics
University of Cambridge

Bishop Kallistos Ware
Orthodox Christian Church

David Wasdell
Director
Unit for Research into Changing Institutions

Institutional affiliation is given for identification purposes only.

All signatories do so as individuals expressing their personal opinions and not as representatives of their organizations.