

The Bahá'í Chair for World Peace hosts successful virtual conference on Global Climate Crisis: Seeking Solutions

The world was a different place a number of months ago when the Baha'i Chair began the process of organizing our recent virtual conference. Long before the advent of the Covid-19, we planned to offer our conference virtually – the better to highlight the global, diffuse nature of environmental challenges. Sadly, these same challenges are paralleled in our coronavirus crisis – offering both hope for what we can accomplish and warnings of our essential unpreparedness.

The current global health crisis that has since emerged is a source of sadness and concern, as we mourn the loss of many lives and turn our attention to the battle ahead. Our hearts go out to those who have lost friends and loved ones and to those on the front lines of the global effort to stop Covid-19.

The current health crisis shows how individuals, communities, institutions, and governments must come together to address a common concern. Today's crisis calls for a non-partisan, united action based on scientific evidence and ethical considerations. It demands moral courage. The same is true for climate change.

Climate change is among the major impediments to global peace and security. Last tuesday's conference – ***Global Climate Crisis: Seeking Solutions*** – brought together six scholars from a diverse range of disciplines and regions of the world.



Dr. Richard Houghton, Senior Scientist at the Woods Hole Research Center in Falmouth, Massachusetts, began the conference by discussing the importance of land management for the global carbon cycle and climate change. He highlighted different options for removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and how crucial it is to begin to implement these options in order to keep the earth's temperature from continuing to rise. In closing, he emphasized that solutions will take both individual and combined efforts, that "Everything you do is making a vote for that way of living. We have to rethink what we are investing in."



Dr. Rathana Peou Norbert-Munns, the Southeast Asia Scenarios Coordinator at CCAFS, also emphasized the importance of coordination in responding to climate change. Her presentation highlighted the water-energy-food nexus, and the need to challenge policymakers to think outside of their narrow fields of focus and approach the issue of climate change from an intersectoral frame instead. She noted that "water security, energy security, and food security are very much linked to one another, meaning that the actions in one area can have effects in one or both of the other areas."



The morning continued with Dr. Kyle Powys Whyte, Professor and Timnick Chair at Michigan State University, with a presentation on Indigenous Energy Justice and the Climate

Change Crisis. Dr. Whyte highlighted the issues of justice and equity that are brought to the fore by the climate crisis. He emphasized the vulnerability of indigenous populations to climate change, and the ways in which human and social relationships create risks for these groups. One of the challenges Dr. Whyte identified is the lack of coordination amongst key groups which is essential for responding to the climate crisis. In response to this he highlighted the need for solutions to be based on relationships of coordination and with an emphasis on values and ethics.



Translating research into policy is a key part of the work done by the third presenter, Dr. Victoria Keener, Research Fellow at the East-West Center, Lead Principal Investigator of the NOAA Pacific Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments, and Lead Author of the Hawai'i and US-Affiliate Pacific Islands chapter of the 4th US National Climate Assessment. Dr. Keener

highlighted the important work that boundary organizations do in providing regional information and risk-framing for climate change in locally specific contexts. The approach taken is based on the co-production of knowledge between researchers and end users to make sure that the right information is getting into the hands of decision makers.



Professor Maxine Burkett, Professor of Law at the William S. Richardson School of Law, University of Hawai'i and a Global Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars,

continued the discussion with a focus on climate justice. Her presentation focused on the challenge of climate reparations, and how to best prepare for and respond to climate induced migrations. Here she argued the emphasis must be placed on building partnerships, trust, and shared purpose, and ensuring that the focus remains on the most vulnerable. Professor Burkett also noted the challenges with the current system of compartmentalization between international, domestic, and hybrid law systems which make appeals to legal obligations more challenging for those seeking reparations.



Dr. Melissa Nursey-Bray, Associate Professor and Interim Head of School at the Social Sciences and Department of Geography of the University of Adelaide, Australia, rounded out the conference with a presentation on the intractability of wicked problems, and the importance of engaging communities in environmental decision making. Her research has focused on the myriad challenges facing

Indigenous peoples in confronting climate change and her presentation highlighted the differentiated inequalities in the recent bushfires in Australia. Dr. Nursey-Bray emphasized the need to change the individualistic behavior of societies, and highlighted the importance of harnessing conflict and challenge as a transformative process to bring about new solutions.

Overall, the discussions throughout the conference demonstrate the way change can be rendered – individually, together. Locally, globally. From big ideas to small acts of duty.

At The Baha'i Chair for World Peace, we believe that the most challenging issues of the day require the attention of us all, and that success can only happen when we roll up our sleeves and get to work. We believe that great human endeavors can also begin in small ways – around kitchen tables, in small rooms – alone, together.

The approaches pursued by the Baha'i Chair for World Peace center on learning all that we can about how to remove the barriers to global peace, which include five themes.

They are; structural racism and the root causes of prejudice, understanding human nature, empowerment of women and peace, frontiers of global governance and leadership, and overcoming challenges in the globalization of the environment – these research programs are the Chair's attempt to do what it can to bridge the gaps.

The state of our natural world today suggests that much is wrong with *us*, and that we have failed, at least in part. Harshness towards our outward world reveals harshness towards our inner world – the greedy, rapacious nature of late capitalism, the pushing harm of autocratic societies, and the moral dubiousness of severe wealth discrepancies shape an environmental approach that is convoluted and unsustainable.

We are trustees of the earth, individually and collectively. I encourage you to pause, consider, and determine what must occur. If we are to be successful in our shared humanity, we must find the moral resources needed to assist an ailing world. We – alone and together – must find a way to secure the future of our natural world, which sustains our shared humanity.

The videos from the conference are available now on our youtube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/BahaiChair>