

Summary of interfaith parliamentary briefing on COP26

Overview of event

On Monday 14 June the Make COP Count coalition of faith groups held an online parliamentary event in partnership with the all-party parliamentary groups (APPG) on Climate Change and the APPG on Faith and Society.

It was an opportunity for the Make COP Count coalition to inform parliamentarians about faith groups' priorities in the run-up to COP26, particularly the priority of tackling loss and damage from climate breakdown. Faith groups were able to connect with parliamentarians with a view to working together on the issues in the coming months.

Attendees were members of parliament (MPs), members of the House of Lords (Peers and Lords Spiritual) and faith representatives (including faith leaders, young faith representatives, and members of staff from faith-based organisations). There were speeches by a UK faith representative and climate justice campaigners in Bangladesh and the Solomon Islands, with opening and closing remarks by Stephen Timms MP and Caroline Lucas MP.

Summary of speeches

Canon Giles Goddard, Chair, Make COP Count coalition

Giles introduced the event and explained that faith groups have a role to play in addressing the climate crisis because of their commitment to bringing about positive change and their extensive networks and expertise.

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP, Chair, APPG on Faith and Society

Stephen said faith groups had been extraordinarily responsive during the Covid-19 pandemic because they had existing infrastructure in place. This this played a key role in their collaboration with the authorities. The Jubilee Debt and Make Poverty History campaigns are powerful examples of how faith groups have built a political consensus for action. Faith groups can do the same for radical climate action, he said, by mobilising people to make the moral case for political change.

Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal, Trustee, Faith for the Climate

Jagbir explained that all faiths share the common values of equality, fairness, compassion and justice, and a common message of protecting the Earth. Faith groups nationally and internationally have already recognised the seriousness of climate breakdown and taken responsibility to act on it. The Make COP Count group is an example of this, she said.

The Make COP Count coalition has two top priorities: ending fossil fuel subsidies and establishing a new finance facility for loss and damage. Loss and damage refers to the impact that climate breakdown is having on people right now. It includes the loss of lives, livelihoods, homes, cultures, traditions and habitats.

Enamul Mazid Khan Siddique, Head of Climate Justice and Natural Resource Rights, Oxfam in Bangladesh

Enam outlined how tens of thousands of people in Bangladesh are being displaced by the impacts of climate breakdown, especially severe flooding. Wildlife habitats are lost due to flooding and by people moving into new areas. All adaptation strategies have been exhausted. It is not surprising, he said, that many Bangladeshis are fleeing to Europe.

People formerly used climate risk insurance to try to manage the costs of flooding, but flooding has become so regular that soaring premiums have made insurance no longer an option. Enam hopes that world leaders will agree financing for loss and damage, to rehabilitate communities affected by climate breakdown globally. He hopes that the UK will show bolder leadership than the EU, and that COP26 in Glasgow will have a better result than COP21 in Paris.

Gareth Quity, Project Coordinator – PACCCIL, Oxfam in the Solomon Islands

Gareth said that for Solomon Islanders, climate change is real, and they are facing the brunt of it. His story of loss and damage is one of displacement. Many communities in atolls and along the coast of the Solomon Islands have become uninhabitable due to sea rise, tropical cyclones and flooding. Five islands have already submerged underwater and countless homes and gardens have been destroyed. In April earlier this year, 27 lives were lost due to tropical cyclones. Solomon Islanders have no choice but to relocate. Cultures and traditions are lost as people become minorities in foreign countries. Livelihoods and lives are lost through displacement.

Gareth said he and his fellow Christian Solomon Islanders ask UK faith groups to amplify their voice. He asked them to talk about climate crisis-driven displacement and migration; prioritise frontline communities; engage women, young people, and people with disabilities in the design of new loss and damage mechanisms; and ensure these are separate from funding for adaptation. Gareth hopes that progress will be made to support loss and damage at COP26.

Dr Caroline Lucas MP, Chair, APPG on Climate Change

Caroline remarked on the diverse range of faith groups at the meeting and said faith groups' values are also shared by parliamentarians campaigning for social change. We have a moral duty to address the impact of climate breakdown on the most vulnerable, she said.

Delivery on loss and damage is one of the most important issues at this COP, she argued, and is a priority for the APPG on Climate Change. We need new and additional finance for loss and damage, not just adaptation or mitigation. We also need to ensure policies across government departments are joined up, aligning policies on climate change with those on trade and aid. The APPG will be reaching out to communities in the Global South and asking for a meeting with Alok Sharma about loss and damage.

Caroline called on parliamentarians to continue working with faith groups to address these issues, and to look out for the Make COP Count coalition's forthcoming briefing. Faith groups should continue to apply pressure to MPs and Peers, she said.

About Make COP Count

Make COP Count is a network of representatives from faith communities focusing on advocacy, hospitality and consciousness-raising activities related to the COP26 climate talks. We believe the global response to the climate crisis must be rooted in justice and human rights, and we see action on loss and damage as essential to this.

Participating faith groups include the Church of England, Eco Congregation Scotland, the Eco Dharma Network, Eco-Sikh UK, Eco Synagogue, Faith for the Climate, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Hindu Climate Action, Islamic Relief UK, the Joint Public Issues Team (made up of the Baptist Union, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church), and Quakers in Britain.

More information about our work can be found at makecopcount.org.
Contact us at cop26liaison@faithfortheclimate.org.uk.



Photo: Canon Giles Goddard, Chair of the Make COP Count coalition and Faith for the Climate, and Stephen Timms MP, Chair of the APPG on Faith and Society, speaking at the event on 14 June.