

A Statement to the Government
on the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the Paris Agreement
for COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2021
from the Religious Leaders and Interfaith Groups of Aotearoa New Zealand

Humanity must right now confront the greatest moral and spiritual challenge in its history to date. As the recent United Nations IPCC Assessment Report, AR6, concludes, there is no hope of limiting global warming to even 2°C if we do not *commit to effective action now*. Already in our closest geographic region the disastrous consequences of a near 1.2°C rise in average global surface temperature are threatening the viability of more and more low-lying Pacific Island nations.

As people of faith seeking to respond to this challenge we draw comfort and insight from the rich traditions and teachings of the many religious communities now present in Aotearoa New Zealand. From each we see powerful invocations for all to care deeply for the natural world alongside caring for all of humanity. Many of the world's religions, including Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and Baha'i have urged the need for environmental protection and conservation. Key to religious teaching is the understanding that sustainable and harmonious relationships between all of humanity and nature is not merely an abstract ideal but rather a comprehensive guide for living justly and gently upon the earth.

We are mindful also that our religious traditions have much in common with understandings central to Te Ao Māori. We acknowledge respectfully that through the teachings of traditional karakia the natural world is understood to be of sacred importance; that through the invocation of whakapapa comes the understanding that everything and everyone within Te Ao Whānui is interconnected and that through the shared responsibility of kaitiakitanga we accept that it is the duty of all humankind to care for the oceans and the earth and all who dwell therein.

Tragically, it is our collective failure to heed either these religious and indigenous teachings, or indeed to heed the warnings long given by climate change scientists, by environmental activists or by political figures deeply attuned to the perils of climate change which now results in an unmitigated global crisis.

At this time therefore we urge the Government to consider anew the benefit of incorporating the age-old teachings and values of religious and indigenous communities in your response to the Paris Agreement.

Religious and indigenous communities, who act collectively, who care for humankind and the environment, and who show compassion especially in times of crisis and distress, now have a significant role to play.

We recognise the enormity of the task, especially for rich and powerful countries whose models of extraction, production, consumption, and waste are causing the current environmental breakdown, including climate change, loss of biodiversity, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, water and air pollution, soil depletion, habitat destruction and mass extinction of many living organisms. We abhor the huge disparities in wealth, consumption and carbon emissions that continue to exist globally and in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Specifically we urge Government to engage the climate change kaupapa by:

- Committing to the strongest possible Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the COP26 climate negotiations, in order to align the 2022 -2030 NDC with a 1.5°C limit to global temperature increase. To do this, our nation must aim to achieve at least a 50 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and aim to achieve net zero emissions earlier than 2050.
- Committing to include experts from religious and indigenous communities to represent Aotearoa New Zealand at all international climate change forums. Respect for Te Tiriti o Waitangi mandates a requirement for equal Māori/non-Māori partnership relationships to be established in all aspects of representation and leadership associated with bodies established to work on these matters into the future.
- Actively advocating for those island nations of the Pacific already suffering from sea level rise and other hugely destructive direct climate change impacts.
- Ensuring a Just Transition by giving attention to measures such as: assessment of distributional inequities; policies to address unequal impacts and ensure income support; support of workers in high emissions sectors to retrain for roles in a zero-emissions economy.
- Supporting citizens disadvantaged by the climate crisis, through changes in government policies on tax, agriculture, energy and transport, and greatly increased investments in green and sustainable technology and practices.
- Ensuring that any use of purchased off-shore credits for mitigation is a “last resort” measure and is robustly verified for environmental integrity.
- Making the transition to a non-exploitative and green economy a top priority, the transition supported by science-based targets that are aligned with a healthy, resilient and zero-emissions future.
- Funding education on climate transitions on a par with public education for the management of the Covid-19 pandemic, providing a recalibrated system of education which will prepare young people and adults in a process of life-long learning for participation in a regenerative economy.
- Working with all those who are already actively educating people about climate change and climate action, including indigenous and faith communities.
- Taking a principled approach to responsibility for historic emissions. In achieving high standards of living, Aotearoa New Zealand has emitted more carbon per capita than most other countries. We therefore have a greater responsibility to reduce emissions as well as greater capacity to reduce emissions. This goes along with providing support for ‘developing countries’ to develop further through low emissions economies.

A Tiriti/Treaty of Waitangi Relationships Framework must guide the new NDC and all other aspects of response to the climate emergency. Te Ao Māori offers an integrated worldview which supports the whole-of-systems approach needed for a regenerative economy. Tangata Whenua-approved applications of tikanga will ensure that agreed standards provide the protection required for ngā taonga tuku iho, te whenua and te taiao (heritage, land and nature) This will have a positive impact on the restoration of ecological balance and on harm reduction levels in particular.

Faith communities are committed to putting energy into the task of restoring our relationships with the natural world in ways that work. Faced with the existential threat inherent in the climate crisis, we will draw on time-tested methods within our traditions, such as practices of renewal and behaviour change, renunciation, living simply and caring for each other, to guide us in undertaking this sacred work of restoration together, Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti.

We urge the Government to find the moral and political courage that is required to engage this kaupapa fully on our behalf, both at home and at COP26 in Glasgow.

Kia hora te marino	May the seas be calm
Kia whakapapa pounamu te Moana	May the shimmer of summer
Kia tere te kārohirohi	Glisten like the precious greenstone
	And dance gently across our pathways

(as together we seek now to preserve and protect the most sacred gift of all,
the gift of all of life on the earth.)

The Statement was prepared jointly by members of the Religious Diversity Centre together with a specially commissioned workgroup of persons well versed in matters of Climate Change.

The Religious Diversity Centre Trust co-chairs, Jocelyn Armstrong, Dr Jenny Te Paa Daniel, The Advisory Workgroup: The Ven. Amala Wrightson, Dr Paul Blaschke, Dr Mary Eastham, Dr Anwar Ghani, Dr Nicola Hoggard Creegan, Sunlou Liuvaie, Dr Betsan Martin, Dr Richard Milne, Rod Oram, Amy Ross, Mandira Shailaj, Dr Bob Skipp, Anton Spelman.

Notes on Te Reo terms used in the statement

Kaupapa

A set of values or principles that form the basis for just action.

Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti

Tangata, or people of the whenua or land, are thus tangata whenua, the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand. Tangata Tiriti are those later arrivals all of whom are mandated to be in Aotearoa New Zealand by virtue of the Treaty of Waitangi.

Te Ao Māori and Te Ao Whānui

Te Ao Māori, the Māori world view, based on the principle of whanaungatanga or the interconnectedness or interrelatedness of all within the living and spiritual realms.

Te Ao Whānui, the wider world and all within it.

Tikanga

The correct way of doing things in accordance with Maori tradition.

Whakapapa and Kaitiakitanga

Whakapapa, genealogical relatedness. Kaitiakitanga, the responsibility for exercising a duty of care.

Notes on technical terms used in the statement

In order of first appearance in the text.

Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)

Each country that is party to the Paris Agreement (see below) must define its contribution to achieving the long-term temperature goal set out in the Paris Agreement. This contribution, and any targets that are part of it, is called the Nationally Determined Contribution.

Paris Agreement

The international treaty concluded in Paris in 2015, concerning efforts to address climate change after 2020. It was developed under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate (1992).

COP26 climate negotiations

The 26th yearly conference held within the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This conference will take place in Glasgow, Scotland in early November 2021.

United Nations Sixth IPCC Assessment Report

The most recent (August 2021) of a series of reports which assess scientific, technical, and socio-economic information concerning climate change, produced by the IPCC.

IPCC

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The IPCC's work is widely agreed upon by both leading climate scientists and United Nations member states.

Committing to the strongest possible Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the COP26 climate negotiations

New Zealand's current NDC falls far short of the goals of the Paris Agreement. It would deliver only a moderate reduction in emissions which would be consistent with up to 3°C of global warming, according to analysis by Carbon Action Tracker <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/new-zealand/>, which is run by a consortium of leading climate science institutions.

Instead, New Zealand's NDC should meet the challenge set by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Special Report on 1.5 °C in 2019. It found that global carbon dioxide emissions would have to fall between 40 and 58 percent by 2030 from 2010 levels to have even a 50% to 66% chance of remaining within 1.5 degrees.

Pacific nations already suffering from sea level rise and other hugely destructive direct climate change impacts

As well as rising sea levels threatening low-lying small islands, Pacific countries are experiencing other climate-related threats such as the increasing frequency and severity of cyclones and droughts, coral bleaching, ocean acidification, and freshwater sources becoming unusable through saltwater incursion. These impacts are all affecting the actual ability of people to continue living in their Pacific homelands, and therefore also causing the destruction of their way of life and cultural heritage.

Just Transition

An inclusive framework that uses a range of economic and social interventions needed to secure the rights of affected people such as workers and minority groups, when a region or economic sector is shifting to a sustainable future path in combating climate change.

Off-shore carbon credits for mitigation

An indirect way of New Zealand meeting emissions reduction targets is to purchase emissions units (arising from an emissions trading scheme) or emissions reductions and removals from overseas, rather than achieving them domestically. Such emission units or reductions are available on international markets but it is often difficult to trace whether they have been generated legally or ethically. Meeting emissions budgets this way also shifts the burden of reducing gross emissions onto future generations. Therefore, they should only be used as a last resort for meeting emissions budgets.

Non-exploitative, green and regenerative economy

A green economy is an economy that aims at reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities, and that aims for sustainable development without degrading the environment. An economy that recognises ecological boundaries for all life and activities on our planet Earth. This economy must also be fair, aiming for social and environmental justice (see Just Transition).

In this economy, budgets must incentivise industry transitions without economic collapse. Relevant examples for different sectors in Aotearoa include replacing coal boilers with biomass boilers in food processing, expanding renewable energy supply and energy conservation, setting pathways for transport by putting an end to importation of internal combustion engine vehicles, ambitiously expanding the use of urban public transport, and incentivising cycling and walking. In our important agricultural sector, dairy and some meat production must be de-intensified. Regenerative agricultural principles must be incorporated into farming systems, in which ecological diversity (rather than monocultures) is welcomed, soil health is nurtured, and carbon drawn into the soil.

Historic emissions

The cumulative carbon emissions since the start of the industrial revolution have brought us to the climate crisis of today. International discussion on effort-sharing approaches between countries have often focused on the principle of individual countries taking responsibility for their historic emissions. This means that countries that have emitted more in the past need to make deeper and faster emissions reductions now.

Te Tiriti/Treaty of Waitangi Relationships Framework

A community leadership framework understood in terms of relationships between Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti together, drawing on the worldview and values of both.

No government, even the most progressive, is yet prepared to contemplate the transformation we need: a global programme that places the survival of humanity and the rest of life on Earth above all other issues. We need not just new policy, but a new ethics.

We need to close the gap between knowing and doing. But this conversation has scarcely begun.

—George Monbiot