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The Holy Land: the ecological turning point of the three religions

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JERUSALEM

A Joint Declaration by Christians, Jews and Muslims is to be presented in Jerusalem on 25 July, in which religious leaders will be asked to get involved in the fight against climate change

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That the three great monotheistic religions in Jerusalem should agree on anything these days, is a miracle. But that they should choose to launch a joint appeal to world leaders on climate change – in other words, on one of the issues that have diplomats from all over the world struggling – is definitely incredible. Yet this is the aim of an initiative that will be presented in Jerusalem on 25 July. With the support of highly respected names from the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities of the Holy City.

Ascolta

Trascrizione fonetica

It is called "Holy Land Declaration on Climate Change" and looks specifically at the International Climate Conference which is to be held in Durban, South Africa, next November. This is a continuation of the meetings held in Copenhagen in 2009 and Cancun in 2010, both of which terminated without an agreement being reached regarding the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions that the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)*, the group commissioned by the UN to monitor the phenomenon, really believes is essential for combating global warming.

In preparation for Durban, a cartel of organizations of various denominations are acting in different countries around the world to urge religious leaders to fight for the cause. They want them to go in person to Durban to put pressure on politicians, and have written letters to the Pope, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I and the Dalai Lama, inviting them to attend.

Meanwhile, however, a first important result was achieved in Jerusalem, with the adhesion of the *Council of the Religious Institution of the Holy Land*, the organization which has the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, the Palestinian Ministry Religious Affairs, the Islamic Courts and the heads of Christian churches in Jerusalem all sitting around the same table. A confrontation within this small parliament of religions produced a joint statement which on Monday, July 25th will be officially presented by the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Fuad Twal, by the Palestinian Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs Salah Haj Zuheika and Rabbi David Rosen, director for Religious Affairs of the *American Jewish Committee*, one of the most important Jewish organizations worldwide. The location deliberately chosen for the event, will be the *American Colony* hotel in Jerusalem - the headquarters of the foreign press.

That of religious leaders in the Holy Land is a real *endorsement* of the *IPCC* program: "We recognize - the statement reads - the scientific evidence of climate change caused by man and the threat it poses to human societies and the planet, as explained by the United Nations *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, and we also recognize the spiritual roots of this crisis and the importance of providing a religious response."

Hence the invitation to proceed with a "major rethink of their spiritual and physical relationship with this God-given planet and how we consume and use of its blessed resources." But religious leaders - very concretely – ask believers "to reduce their personal greenhouse gas emissions and urge their political leaders to adopt strong, binding and scientifically motivated targets to reduce greenhouse gases, in order to avoid even worst dangers of a climate crisis."

Behind this green turning point for religions in the Holy Land is the work of a young California born rabbi, who immigrated to Israel in 2003: his name is Yonatan Neril, and he has a degree on environmental issues from Stanford University. He keeps an environmentalist blog entitled *Jewcology* and in Jerusalem he is the director of the *Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development*, which promoted the joint statement.

Neril looks to the Climate Conference in Durban, but also the environmental emergency in the Holy Land. Because in the Middle East, water scarcity is an increasing problem and Israel and Palestine may eventually find themselves both victims of climate change. For this reason, the rabbi from California is thinking of another, even more ambitious project: to establish in Jerusalem a network of young Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders who are aware of the importance of the environment.

Because - after much mutual dispute - there will come the day when this land, which in words everyone here calls holy, will also be defended.

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