THE ISLAMIC DECLARATION ON GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE
By Alice Loyd

The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change was published by Islamic leaders from 20 countries at the International Islamic Climate Change Symposium in Istanbul on August 17-18, 2015. The Declaration presents the moral case, based on Islamic teachings, for the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims and people of all faiths worldwide to take urgent climate action. The entire document can be read [here](#).

The Islamic Declaration begins, “God—Whom we know as Allah—has created the universe in all its diversity, richness and vitality: the stars, the sun and moon, the Earth and all its communities of living beings.” In majestic language it continues by reviewing the procession of Earth’s history from creation to our day, concluding the review with words that reflect particular concern for the role played by oil:

> In the brief period since the Industrial Revolution, humans have consumed much of the non-renewable resources which have taken the Earth 250 million years to produce – all in the name of economic development and human progress. We note with alarm the combined impacts of rising per capita consumption combined with the rising human population. We also note with alarm the multi-national scramble now taking place for more fossil fuel deposits under the dissolving ice caps in the arctic regions. We are accelerating our own destruction through these processes.

The Declaration affirms the scientific consensus concerning anthropocentric climate change and names the reports and events through which the world has begun the attempt to halt the damage. Then it says:

> Leading climate scientists now believe that a rise of two degrees centigrade in global temperature, which is considered to be the “tipping point”, is now very unlikely to be avoided if we continue with business-as-usual; other leading climate scientists consider 1.5 degrees centigrade to be a more likely “tipping point”. This is the point considered to be the threshold for catastrophic climate change, which will expose yet more millions of people and countless other creatures to drought, hunger and flooding. The brunt of this will continue to be borne by the poor, as the Earth experiences a drastic increase in levels of carbon in the atmosphere brought on in the period since the onset of the industrial revolution.

This history is followed by a series of affirmations from the Qur’an. These include:

> He raised the heaven and established the balance
> So that you would not transgress the balance.
> Give just weight – do not skimp in the balance.
> He laid out the Earth for all living creatures.
> Qur’an 55: 7-10

> God created the Earth in perfect equilibrium (mīzān);
By His immense mercy we have been given fertile land, fresh air, clean water and all the good things on Earth that makes our lives here viable and delightful; The Earth functions in natural seasonal rhythms and cycles: a climate in which living beings—including humans—thrive; The present climate change catastrophe is a result of the human disruption of this balance.

The particular responsibility of Muslims with regard to caring for Earth is explained in several ways. The first is a call to follow the example of the Prophet, “to act according to the example of the Prophet Muhammad (God’s peace and blessings be upon him) who—
- Declared and protected the rights of all living beings,
- outlawed the custom of burying infant girls alive,
- prohibited killing living beings for sport,
- guided his companions to conserve water even in washing for prayer,
- forbade the felling of trees in the desert,
- ordered a man who had taken some nestlings from their nest to return them to their mother, and when he came upon a man who had lit a fire on an anthill, commanded, “Put it out, put it out!”;
- Established inviolable zones (harams) around Makkah and Al-Madinah, within which native plants may not be felled or cut and wild animals may not be hunted or disturbed;
- Established protected areas (himas) for the conservation and sustainable use of rangelands, plant cover and wildlife.
- Lived a frugal life, free of excess, waste, and ostentation;
- Renewed and recycled his meagre possessions by repairing or giving them away;
- Ate simple, healthy food, which only occasionally included meat;
- Took delight in the created world; and
- Was, in the words of the Qur’an, “a mercy to all beings.”

In conclusion, the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change issues a series of calls to action directed to particular groups and individuals, beginning with the international bodies formed to address the crisis. Next it issues the call to “the well-off nations and oil-producing states,” asking them to
- Lead the way in phasing out their greenhouse gas emissions as early as possible and no later than the middle of the century;
- Provide generous financial and technical support to the less well-off to achieve a phase-out of greenhouse gases as early as possible;
- Recognize the moral obligation to reduce consumption so that the poor may benefit from what is left of the Earth’s non-renewable resources;
- Stay within the 2-degree limit, or, preferably, within the 1.5-degree limit, bearing in mind that two-thirds of the Earth’s proven fossil fuel reserves remain in the ground;
- Re-focus their concerns from unethical profit from the environment, to that of preserving it and elevating the condition of the world’s poor.
- Invest in the creation of a green economy.

The Declaration calls upon “the people of all nations and their leaders” to implement these desirable directions, including to “commit themselves to 100 % renewable energy and/or a zero emissions strategy; invest in decentralized renewable energy, which is the best way to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development; and realize that to chase after unlimited economic growth in a planet that is
finite and already overloaded is not viable. Growth must be pursued wisely and in moderation; placing a priority on increasing the resilience of all, and especially the most vulnerable.”

As did the Catholic pope’s encyclical, the Islamic declaration emphasizes the plight of the poor, calling on all to “set in motion a fresh model of wellbeing, based on an alternative to the current financial model which depletes resources, degrades the environment, and deepens inequality.” It asks everyone to “prioritise adaptation efforts with appropriate support to the vulnerable countries with the least capacity to adapt. And to vulnerable groups, including indigenous peoples, women and children.”

The document singles out corporations, finance, and the business sector as well, asking these to “shoulder the consequences of their profit-making activities, and take a visibly more active role in reducing their carbon footprint and other forms of impact upon the natural environment; change from the current business model which is based on an unsustainable escalating economy, and to adopt a circular economy that is wholly sustainable; and pay more heed to social and ecological responsibilities, particularly to the extent that they extract and utilize scarce resources.”

The Declaration concludes, “We call on all Muslims wherever they may be—

طُوْلَا الْجِبَالِ ۚ تَبْنِلَّعْ ۚ وَلَنَّ الأَرْضُ تنْحَرِقَ ۗ أَنِّئِلٌ مَّرْحَ حَا الأَرْضُ فِي تَمْشِ وَٰلَا
Do not strut arrogantly on the Earth.
You will never split the Earth apart
nor will you ever rival the mountains’ stature.
Qur’an 17: 37

We bear in mind the words of our Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him):

The world is sweet and verdant, and verily Allah has made you stewards in it, and He sees how you acquit yourselves.