



# A community of young Christians, Muslims and Jews works for climate justice

31.08.2014 | World Council of Churches

**Amidst the reality of tensions often fueled by religions, a group of Christian, Muslim and Jewish youth has formed a multi-faith community. As part of an interfaith summer course sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC), this community wants to work for the protection of creation – a concern they say is common to all faith traditions.**

This community of 19 Christian, Muslim and Jewish students from 12 different countries is hosted by the WCC's Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, from 4 to 22 August.

Among participants in the course is Tariq Abdul Akbar, a 21-year-old Muslim from the United States. A convert to Islam at the age 18, and a student at the Community College of Baltimore, Akbar realizes the importance of working together as religious communities for climate justice.

"Where I come from, I observe separations within diversity. It is often politics rather than religious philosophies that divide us," said Akbar. "However, we must know as people of faith that we need to put aside our religious differences and come together to raise awareness about climate change. After all this is a human rights issue and affects all people in the world."

Akbar will be in a group of young people who will participate at the Interfaith Summit on Climate Change in New York which will be held from 21 to 22 September.

The students in the summer course are drafting a statement on climate change to be presented at the Summit. This statement, Akbar explained, will feature perspectives from young people, who want to see visible actions from the states and policy makers for climate justice.

"With leaders from the WCC and other religious communities, we hope to communicate our concerns at the United Nations Secretary General's Climate Summit on 23 September. We hope to include voices from young people in the global debate on climate change," Akbar said.

Mark Edwards, another student from the Church of Ceylon in Sri Lanka, echoes similar views.

Edwards highlights the impact of climate change on developing countries, which he says are bearing the brunt of ecological disasters. Through scriptural reasoning sessions, where religious texts from Christian, Muslim and Jewish traditions were studied, Edwards finds his inspiration to address climate issues. "The ethical responsibility to respect creation is common to all the Abrahamic faiths," he said. "The earth is a gift to all of us and we are responsible for its well-being," he added.

Edwards said the scriptural reasoning made him adopt a new perspective on his work regarding climate issues in local communities. "Even if we interpret and understand religious texts in different ways, there are common visions in our holy books that teach us to respect our environment."

## Climate change: a common concern

“We are responsible for the future of our children. Therefore, we must use our religious and ethical responsibility to create awareness about climate change,” Edwards added.

On his return to Sri Lanka, a country of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Muslims, Edwards hopes to conduct meetings for youth and children in his church. “Through these programmes, we hope to encourage young people to create awareness about climate change and its impact”.

For Liron Alkolombra, a representative of the Jewish tradition at the summer course in Bossey, living in a multi-faith community is an “eye opener”. “Living together as one community has made us take off our masks and shed stereotypes,” said Alkolombra.

“Our visit to a synagogue, a church and a mosque in Switzerland moved me. I realized that we all believe in one God and are part of humanity,” she said. “While in the class rooms we have respectful discussions, outside the class rooms we still encounter real lives,” she said. These encounters, Alkolombra said, made her value mutual respect while not shying away from realities.

Alkolombra, who is a tour guide in the city of Jerusalem, said that water is a major issue in her region. “I have been raised in a culture, where I know the importance of water. I knew as a child that we must not waste water.” While faced with such challenges, she continued, our religious traditions require us to speak about climate change, water scarcity and issues that concerns all.

Alkolombra will also participate in the New York Interfaith Summit on Climate Change.

The interfaith summer course is organized each year since 2007.

As part of the ecumenical formation initiatives, the course was held by the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey in collaboration with the WCC programme on inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, along with the *Fondation pour l'entre-connaissance* (Inter Knowing Foundation) and the *Fondation Racines et Sources* (Roots and Sources Foundation).

Source: [World Council for Churches](#)