

Faith in action on the climate emergency

Thea Ormerod, *Australasian Muslim Times*, 15 November 2019



As fires burn across NSW and Queensland, people from diverse faith traditions considered their role in the climate crisis at the inaugural national conference of the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) held on 8-10 November 2019 in Canberra with the theme “Faith in Action: a religious response to the climate emergency”.



Professor Lesley Hughes.

Professor Lesley Hughes of the Climate Council presented the science behind describing the current situation as an “emergency”.

She demonstrated that the observable data on rising average global temperatures leads scientists to conservatively predict the kinds of phenomena as the unprecedented drought and fires that our fellow Australians are suffering today.

Professor Hughes highlighted the fact that Australian emissions have been rising since the carbon pricing legislation was scrapped by the Abbott Government.

The current Coalition Government is dismissive of the findings of the IPCC 1.5 Degree report, paving the way for new coal and gas mining regardless of IPCC warnings that this is incompatible with a safe climate.



Associate Professor Mehmet Ozalp.

Associate Professor Mehmet Ozalp from the Islamic Sciences and Research Academy (ISRA) was one of the respondents to Professor Hughes' presentation.

He outlined the growth of a number of Muslim initiatives internationally, responding to the current climate crisis.

ARRCC President and Catholic grandmother of eight, Thea Ormerod, said, "Political leaders who say that concerned citizens are '*lunatic city*-based greenies' fail to acknowledge the worrying, basic facts that global average temperatures are rising and seas are acidifying." "People in the bush are being failed by denialist-led governments who refuse to support new pathways to economic prosperity, and instead rely on old formulae," Ms Ormerod said.

She further added, "They are paying the highest price for the mismanagement of water resources today. People in the bush are also being robbed of a viable future by government support for coal and gas exports and unsustainable models of agriculture."

The conference considered whether or not human beings could remain hopeful in our hostile political context and worsening environmental crisis.

Professor Hughes and other speakers agreed that hope has to be separate from empirical facts, that hope is necessary if we are to take action. Giving up is not an option.



During the Conference, Muslims, Christians of various denominations, Buddhists, ordained and lay participants drew on faith-based sources of hope as valuable resources for believers.

These include the capacity to trust in a Creator God, dedication to doing what is right without attachment to results and the gifts of meditation or contemplative prayer.

The gathering was inspired by Aboriginal Australians such as Bruce Shillingsworth and Murrawah Johnson speaking about their passion for protecting country.

Ways forward ranged from making climate-conserving lifestyle changes to supporting the School Climate Strikers, putting more signs out the front of places of worship, divestment from fossil fuels and even nonviolent civil resistance.

Uniting Church Minister, Rev Elizabeth Raine, said, “Mobilising people in our churches, forming networks, and protesting to push our government to take meaningful action on climate change is really an imperative.”

The gathering was fortified by two School Climate Strikers, Aoibhinn Crimmins and Tess Carlton.

Ms Crimmins, who was awarded ACT Young Environmentalist of the Year 2019, told the gathering about acting on the climate crisis, “We must jump on that opportunity like our lives depend on it because they truly do and use it as a chance to start from scratch and create a world that we want to live in, together.”

Further reflective pieces on conference content can be found at the blog site of Rev Dr John Squires:

<https://johntsquires.com/2019/11/09/faith-in-action-a-religious-response-to-the-climate-emergency-part-one/>

<https://johntsquires.com/2019/11/09/faith-in-action-a-religious-response-to-the-climate-emergency-part-two/>

<https://johntsquires.com/2019/11/09/faith-in-action-a-religious-response-to-the-climate-emergency-part-three/>