

16 August 2019

Masjid-ul-Islam

Friday Pre-Khutbah Talk

Bismillah ir Rahman ir Rahim. In the name of Allah, the most compassionate and merciful.

Dear Sisters and Brothers. Asalaamualiakum wa Rahmatullahi wa baraktu.

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for allowing me to address you today. We have just observed Eid-ul-Adha, a day of sacrifice and gratitude. Nationally, we commemorated Women's Day reflecting on the importance of insubordinate women and activism for agency. The khutbah's on both these days reminded us of the necessity of our internal spiritual journeys and outward, collective action. With that in mind, the talk today, insha'allah aims to describe the climate change crisis as a fundamental injustice and why we, as Muslims, have a spiritual duty to respond. I'd like to thank the Muslim scholarship who have developed an Islamic eco-justice lens. The climate crisis is one almost inconceivable, yet I'd like to maintain a thread of Tawhid, belief in the Oneness of God, to maintain that our faith or Iman can provide a path to help us navigate.

## WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE?

I'd like to begin with a theological understanding of our relationship with the environment. How do we see and value our environment? Do we see ourselves a part of it or separate? Quranic guidance urges the Ummah to tafakkur. To observe, contemplate, and reflect on inwardly as well as reflect on the signs of God so that we may know God "and All that is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah. Allah encompasses all things." (Surah An Nisa v126). Islam encompasses an appreciation of harmony and a "natural state (fitra) through respecting balance (Mizan) and proportion (mikdar) in the systems of the universe.

In terms of our role on this earth, a familiar verse from Sura Yunus (v14) mandates; "We made you stewards in the land after them so that We may observe how you will do". Stewardship is to take care of and be accountable for the world we live in and is an explicit duty ordained by Allah (SWT), to maintain balance. To borrow from Imam Dr. Rashied Omar's Eid-ul-fitr khutbah at the Claremont Main Road Mosque, an "Islamic Jurisprudence of the Environment" (Fiqh Al-Bi'ah fi al-Islām) is so critical that contemporary Muslim scholars from the University of Jerusalem argue that the challenges we face today necessitate that we review and add caring for our environment (hifz al-bi'ah) to the traditional list of the higher objectives of Islamic law (Maqasid al-Shari'ah).

Muslim scholars have thus had no tradition of separating the study of nature from knowing God on their spiritual journeys (Ibn Sina, Nasir al-Din Tusi, and Jabir ibn al-Hayyan). When reaching out to my peers, or fellow eco-custodians, about what they would like to hear in a khutbah on climate change, most said they had not heard of this topic in a mosque. I think it would be beneficial for us all to proceed with common knowledge and while you may already know the science, I wanted to start with the basics of what is happening to the planet we occupy and in that understanding contemplate the impacts of climate change and how these perspectives are shaped by Tawhid.

Physically, climate change is the increasing temperature of the Earth's climate system and the impacts of this. Temperature is one aspect, but because of the balance of the earth's system or

Mizan, an increase in temperature causes changes such as sea-level rise, rainfall variance and more extreme weather events. Floods, droughts, heat waves or cold fronts are predicted to get worse. In many places, it already has, thinking of recent floods in Mozambique or KZN.

The most recent report by the United Nations body, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, looked at the impact of a temperature increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius and how we only have 12 years to prevent this. This report has finally, and unequivocally, confirmed that these climatic changes that threaten our planetary limits are due to human action... Leading us to call our current era the Anthropocene – the age where accelerated human activity has been the dominant influence on the earth's system. To reflect on the magnitude of this, does surah Al-Furqan (v63) not guide us to be “the servants of the All-Merciful ... who tread lightly on the earth”?

Human actions have resulted in unparalleled levels of carbon dioxide and other harmful gasses into the atmosphere. These Greenhouse gasses, named because of how they absorb and trap heat, are responsible for the warming of the earth. At an individual level, these gasses come from cars, flights, or simply putting on the lights in your home using electricity. If we look at sectors, greenhouse gasses arise through transport, mining or energy production whilst burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil or gas. For example, Sasol emissions > Portugal's. Thinking about the amount of production and industrializing that necessitates the burning of fossil fuels, we cannot separate the topic from our economies that dictate the usage of resources. To say, a neoliberal capitalist economy has shaped the way we view our resources as having utility value for our gains.

Reflecting on Surah Ah-Room (v41): “Corruption has appeared in both land and sea Because of what people's own hands have brought, So that they may taste something of what they have done So that hopefully they will turn back”. In South Africa, we are familiar with the term corruption, and looking at the essence of what it means, it describes the abuse of entrusted power for private or illicit gain.

In our duty as Khalifah or collective Khulafaa, we have been entrusted with a duty to observe and act as stewards of this earth by Allah (SWT). In a sense, this power has been corrupted leaving the earth in a state of fassad, pollution. If we consider the workings of corruption, there are some that stand to gain through the loss of others. A neoliberal capitalist system ensures a concentration of wealth amongst the world's elite 1% whilst an entrenched patriarchal system further divides this along gendered lines. If we look at historic winners and losers of society, we can see undeniable socioeconomic trends, and these trends influence people's ability to respond to changes in the environment.

#### WHAT IS CLIMATE JUSTICE?

There is no sector that will remain untouched in a changing climate. In its report, The IPCC describes the climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth. Climate change will degrade the conditions of those already living in poverty and increase inequality threatening basic rights and access to safe food, water and energy. Those who are already marginalised and have limited means are the same who are systemically excluded from decision making, policy or legal processes. Because the cost of basic living will increase, those with limited means will not have the resources to cope or adapt, while those with established wealth or insurance will be better able to adapt and respond. Some have called this “climate apartheid”

where those with money become even more powerful in society, threatening our existing democratic processes and decision making.

A climate justice perspective thus frames climate change as an ethical and political injustice. This originates in the historical levels of economic growth and industrialisation in the developed world through the underdevelopment of the global south. This has rendered nations of the global south less able to cope with losses and damages due to climate change. Consider the low carbon emissions of small island states, yet the impacts of sea-level rise will be fatal to coastal communities. Because of their small size, they have little power when it comes to international negotiations for greater support to adapt or resources to rebuild where there has already been damaged. This is an example of the politically uneven distribution of negative effects on those least at fault.

Similarly, at an interfaith workshop I attended on the climate justice movement, climate change was fundamentally understood as a moral problem to tackle. The unequivocal agreement was to use our faith-based learnings to replenish our responses with divine guidance and to enjoin our steward-relationship with nature hand with our duty to stand firm against injustices.

The corruption of balance or Mizan is felt at interconnected levels of injustice. Firstly, the earth's physical system is out of balance, and the threats to non-human life have resulted in almost 1 million species at risk of extinction. The importance of respecting all life equally is illustrated in the hadith: "Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it but is regarded as a charitable gift for him."

The custodianship of the earth was duly bestowed in a state of Mizan, yet human action has unjustly endangered the lifeforms we share the planet with: "He has raised the heavens and placed the balance so that you may not transgress the balance (Surah Ah Rahman: 7-8)". Understood economically, this is a neoliberal capitalist crisis where we have depleted the very resources we rely on so that we cannot continue consuming at the current rate that we do now.

Secondly and socially, the impacts and costs of climate change will be disproportionately carried by groups of people that have the lowest impact. Communities' capacity to respond is directly related to the levels of systemic marginalisation along lines of race, class and gender. Within these lines, women as unpaid caregivers and providers of food and fuel, are disproportionately impacted. In South Africa, 59% of women run out of money by mid-month due to household costs. Yet, considering rising expenses, we still face up to 27% lower wages.

Our South African economy has an entrenched relationship with fossil fuel energy, and we are the 14th highest carbon emitter in the world. With a long history of mining and extractives to benefit a white minority through the exploitation of an indigenous population, our national carbon emissions are hugely skewed for a country our size. The legacy of historic and poorly regulated mining continues to this day with reminders of the old mine dumps you see on this horizon. As seen in the documentary Jozi Gold, these continue to contribute to air pollution that results in irreversible health risks for generations from cancer, asthma, or skin problems.

Because of the volume of extractive industries, statistics estimate up to 54 deaths a day due to the dirty air we breathe. Historically marginalised communities continue to be unevenly exposed to current environmental injustices and looming climate risks by being close to industrial activity. Consider the impacts of mining here in Riverlea. Further, marginalised groups are generally the

same who face energy poverty, forcing alternatives like burning coal or wood as energy prices increase. In calling out extractive industries, we must have a holistic perspective of who stands to lose. How might jobs be affected if mines were closed? In our transition to a lower-carbon economy, we must prioritise a JUST transition where the reskilling of workers is prioritised to safe and secure jobs, as we consider radically different ways of energy production and ownership. Today we also [#remembermarikana](#), 9 years later, with no justice to those killed while demanding a better livelihood.

The third level of injustice will be the future generations who will bear the brunt of the impacts, where we are in a position to make changes now. Consider the acts of Greta Thunberg in the Global North with School Strikes for the Climate, or perhaps thousands of environmental activists of the Global South who have already lost their lives in defending the environment.

As Khalifah, what planet may we be leaving for future generations? Even then, how might we answer to the obligation of stewardship on the day of judgement? How can we re-calibrate perspectives and actions in Tawhid so that we may leave the mosque angry at the injustices but with the internal compass and hope to act?

#### WHAT IS OUR DUTY IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE INJUSTICE?

To begin with, strengthening our Tawhid and Iman. The essence of all thoughts, words and deeds begins with Tawhid and the acknowledgement of Ruh-Allah, the spirit of Allah (SWT) blown into each of our souls imbuing us with the capability of living out divine qualities. Our outward deeds become our spiritual activism with actions being the physical manifestations of the spiritual heart. Practically, we have the lifestyle, actions and words of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) as a guide.

The following hadith validates how we might respond to seeing injustice. Abu Sa`eed al-Khudree (may Allah be pleased with him) said; "I heard the Messenger of Allah (SWT) say, Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith."

With a reflective perspective, we understand the nature of this statement commanding an obligation on the seer of evil and wrongdoing to act. "The weakest of faith" is directly translated as the "furthest point". The weak of faith are those who resort to the hand, whilst being far away from the heart. The heart must guide the hand. This asserts the importance of locating the spiritual heart at the centre of all actions or activism. As an injustice, climate change must be spoken about as such, called out and acted upon as something that affects society, and especially those most vulnerable. So where do we start?

Heart: The spirit of Allah (SWT) is felt and remembered in the heart. This is a critical starting point to reflect on our lower-self and destroy our ego. We have just observed Eid-ul-Adha, the festival of sacrifice and at the Eid Khutbah by Sister Safiyyah Surtee we were urged to undertake a personal spiritual pilgrimage to tackle barriers internally that feed our lower-self.

To reflect honestly, is our ego feeding unsustainable consumption patterns including our consumption of meat? "O children of Adam!... eat and drink- but waste not by excess for Allah loves not the wasters." (Surah A - Raaf v31). Considering how much we, as humans, waste, actions to reduce, re-use or recycle could even be physical activities representing breaking down the ego. Fundamentally, it is a privilege to be able to consume enough to need to cut down. Thus, it is in the

destruction of our ego, that we may deeply perceive and advocate for the plight of those who are unevenly impacted by all social injustices: racism, sexism and climate change.

Tongue/Voice: The interpretation of justice as a redistribution towards balance gives us the basis to call out injustice and promote equality. The acknowledgement of the uneven impacts of climate change means to take ownership of our own privileges where they exist, and to use this in a constructive way... step one, talk about climate change!

How can we encourage discussions and solutions that centre on groups at higher risk of the negative effects of climate change? Notably, the most affected should not be spoken about but should be the ones directing the conversation. Are we supporting those who have been excluded to make their voices included? Whose voices are the loudest when we speak about “what we should do about climate change?” How can we use our voices to challenge those who say climate change is not real or how can we help shape understandings of climate change as a systemic injustice when talking with friends, family or co-workers?

Hand: It is critical to be active and mobilised, and even more beneficial to be organised. The importance of collective action in response to injustice has a long history in our country, particularly when responding to political and economic injustices that affect society as a whole. Joining together as collective addresses the systemic and structural causes of climate change and elevates solutions beyond the individual. For e.g. to signing a petition that urges political change, or even joining a protest that demands accountability from companies with high emissions. On the 20th of September, there will be a Global Climate Strike with local action against carbon criminals [#wecantbreathe](#).

Where you have the resources, invest in solutions that are not only aimed at reducing your personal environmental footprint but solutions that benefit many around you. Starting a communal garden, for example, has the potential to support food security, where food prices become too high for many.

More than benefit, how are our actions supporting sustainable resilience of others? Scholars such as Professor Jacklyn Cock suggest “anti-capitalist” solutions away from the individualistic solutions. What does this mean when it comes to building community strength? Collective arrangements for childcare; setting up cooperatives; bulk buying in stokvels; community-owned renewable energy; community food centres or seed sharing in support of growing your own food.

Before closing, I'd like to highlight one of the Prophet's actions that describe a collective, organised response to injustice. Hilf ul-Fudul (حلف الفضول) was a 7th-century alliance created by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and various Makkans, to establish justice for all, especially the marginalized who had no connections to the powerful despite faith. A Yemeni merchant had sold some goods to a member of a notable clan who then refused to pay the agreed price. The wrongdoer knew the merchant had no kinsman in Makkah to help him. But the merchant appealed to the Quraysh to see that justice was done. In formulating a response to the merchant, a pact was formed on two principles: to respect the principles of justice, and collectively intervene in conflicts to establish justice. Among the members who agreed to the terms of the pact was a young Muhammad (puh) and Abu Bakr. Later on, after proclaiming Islam, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) still acknowledged the validity and value of this pact saying He would join it again. Directly translated as, League of the Virtuous, the pact represents collective, interfaith, mobilized and organized action to injustice, especially for the marginalized.

In learning from Sister Ayesha Kajee's Khutbah last week, I'd like to profile the organisations that are making important strides in climate justice work. These organisations premise themselves on bottom-up alternatives that are directed by vulnerable communities, especially women. WAMUA or WoMin are working with women affected by mining, the AIDCs One Million Climate Jobs Campaign is an alliance of labour and others campaigning for the creation of climate jobs as part of a collective approach to the crisis of unemployment and climate change. The African Climate Reality Project supports active citizens for responsible legislation, South Africa's first environmental justice organisation, EarthLife Africa 350Africa and COPAC's Climate Justice Movement are radically mobilizing. Most relevant to this topic, is SAFCEI, The South African Faith Communities Environment Institute. I was going to mention names, but not to detract from the importance of collective action, consider reading up and finding out more about these radical organisations to support.

## CONCLUSION

In closing, I pray I have done justice to illustrating climate change as an injustice. We need to understand climate change as a moral, political and economic problem that leaves those that are the most vulnerable carrying the highest cost. As khilafat, we should fulfil the divine duty of stewardship and within this action mobilize towards justice. In forbidding evil and enjoining good, we have a collective duty as climate change affects us all, and to not think that "others are acting, so I do not have to." Inshallah, I pray that the talk today was of value to you and that Allah (SWT) may accept all our efforts. May our hearts remember Allah (SWT), and may that guide our words, and may that guide our actions in responding to injustices like climate change. For Tawhid, is harmony in submission to Allah (SWT).

Surah Al-Ikhlaas

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah most compassionate and merciful

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

Say: He is Allah, the One and Only;

لِلَّهِ لُصْمَةٌ

Allah, the Eternal, Absolute;

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

He begetteth not, nor is He begotten;

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهٗ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

And there is none like unto Him.

## ORGANISATIONS

- Claremont Main Road Mosque: <https://cmrm.co.za>

- WAMUA: [https://twitter.com/macua\\_sa](https://twitter.com/macua_sa)

- WoMin Alliance | African Women Unite Against Destructive Extractivism: <https://womin.org.za/>

- One Million Climate Jobs: <http://aidc.org.za/program.../million-climate-jobs-campaign/.../>

- African Climate Reality Project: <http://climatereality.co.za/>
- Earthlife Africa Johannesburg: <http://earthlife.org.za/>
- Co-operative and Policy Alternative Center (COPAC): <https://copac.org.za/>
- 350 Africa: <https://350africa.org/>
- The South African Faith Communities Environment Institute (SAFCEI): <https://safcei.org/> Bismillah ir Rahman ir Rahim. In the name of Allah, the most compassionate and merciful.

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## INTRODUCTION

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destruction of our ego, that we may deeply perceive and advocate for the plight of those who are unevenly impacted by all social injustices: racism, sexism and climate change.

Tongue/Voice: The interpretation of justice as a redistribution towards balance gives us the basis to call out injustice and promote equality. The acknowledgement of the uneven impacts of climate change means to take ownership of our own privileges where they exist, and to use this in a constructive way... step one, talk about climate change!

How can we encourage discussions and solutions that centre on groups at higher risk of the negative effects of climate change? Notably, the most affected should not be spoken about but should be the ones directing the conversation. Are we supporting those who have been excluded to make their voices included? Whose voices are the loudest when we speak about “what we should do about climate change?” How can we use our voices to challenge those who say climate change is not real or how can we help shape understandings of climate change as a systemic injustice when talking with friends, family or co-workers?

Hand: It is critical to be active and mobilised, and even more beneficial to be organised. The importance of collective action in response to injustice has a long history in our country, particularly when responding to political and economic injustices that affect society as a whole. Joining together as collective addresses the systemic and structural causes of climate change and elevates solutions beyond the individual. For e.g. to signing a petition that urges political change, or even joining a protest that demands accountability from companies with high emissions. On the 20th of September, there will be a Global Climate Strike with local action against carbon criminals [#wecantbreathe](#).

Where you have the resources, invest in solutions that are not only aimed at reducing your personal environmental footprint but solutions that benefit many around you. Starting a communal garden, for example, has the potential to support food security, where food prices become too high for many.

More than benefit, how are our actions supporting sustainable resilience of others? Scholars such as Professor Jacklyn Cock suggest “anti-capitalist” solutions away from the individualistic solutions. What does this mean when it comes to building community strength? Collective arrangements for childcare; setting up cooperatives; bulk buying in stokvels; community-owned renewable energy; community food centres or seed sharing in support of growing your own food.

Before closing, I’d like to highlight one of the Prophet’s actions that describe a collective, organised response to injustice. Hilf ul-Fudul (حلف الفضول) was a 7th-century alliance created by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and various Makkans, to establish justice for all, especially the marginalized who had no connections to the powerful despite faith. A Yemeni merchant had sold some goods to a member of a notable clan who then refused to pay the agreed price. The wrongdoer knew the merchant had no kinsman in Makkah to help him. But the merchant appealed to the Quraysh to see that justice was done. In formulating a response to the merchant, a pact was formed on two principles: to respect the principles of justice, and collectively intervene in conflicts to establish justice. Among the members who agreed to the terms of the pact was a young Muhammad (puh) and Abu Bakr. Later on, after proclaiming Islam, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) still acknowledged the validity and value of this pact saying He would join it again. Directly translated as, League of the Virtuous, the pact represents collective, interfaith, mobilized and organized action to injustice, especially for the marginalized.

In learning from Sister Ayesha Kajee's Khutbah last week, I'd like to profile the organisations that are making important strides in climate justice work. These organisations premise themselves on bottom-up alternatives that are directed by vulnerable communities, especially women. WAMUA or WoMin are working with women affected by mining, the AIDCs One Million Climate Jobs Campaign is an alliance of labour and others campaigning for the creation of climate jobs as part of a collective approach to the crisis of unemployment and climate change. The African Climate Reality Project supports active citizens for responsible legislation, South Africa's first environmental justice organisation, EarthLife Africa 350Africa and COPAC's Climate Justice Movement are radically mobilizing. Most relevant to this topic, is SAFCEI, The South African Faith Communities Environment Institute. I was going to mention names, but not to detract from the importance of collective action, consider reading up and finding out more about these radical organisations to support.

## CONCLUSION

In closing, I pray I have done justice to illustrating climate change as an injustice. We need to understand climate change as a moral, political and economic problem that leaves those that are the most vulnerable carrying the highest cost. As khilafat, we should fulfil the divine duty of stewardship and within this action mobilize towards justice. In forbidding evil and enjoining good, we have a collective duty as climate change affects us all, and to not think that "others are acting, so I do not have to." Inshallah, I pray that the talk today was of value to you and that Allah (SWT) may accept all our efforts. May our hearts remember Allah (SWT), and may that guide our words, and may that guide our actions in responding to injustices like climate change. For Tawhid, is harmony in submission to Allah (SWT).

Surah Al-Ikhlaas

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah most compassionate and merciful

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

Say: He is Allah, the One and Only;

لِلَّهِ لَصْمُدٌ

Allah, the Eternal, Absolute;

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

He begetteth not, nor is He begotten;

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهٗ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

And there is none like unto Him.

## ORGANISATIONS

- Claremont Main Road Mosque: <https://cmrm.co.za>

- WAMUA: [https://twitter.com/macua\\_sa](https://twitter.com/macua_sa)

- WoMin Alliance | African Women Unite Against Destructive Extractivism: <https://womin.org.za/>

- One Million Climate Jobs: <http://aidc.org.za/program.../million-climate-jobs-campaign/.../>

- African Climate Reality Project: <http://climatereality.co.za/>
- Earthlife Africa Johannesburg: <http://earthlife.org.za/>
- Co-operative and Policy Alternative Center (COPAC): <https://copac.org.za/>
- 350 Africa: <https://350africa.org/>
- The South African Faith Communities Environment Institute (SAFCEI): <https://safcei.org/>