



ISNA Leads Muslim Environmental Engagement

Humanity has forgotten its role as God's representative on Earth

BY THE ISNA GREEN INITIATIVE TEAM

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL degradation remain existential threats. Scientific studies continue to draw our attention to them, as do the increasing frequency of such extreme weather events as extraordinary forest fires, more destructive hurricanes — obvious signs of human-caused climate change.

More than 700 Quranic verses and scores of hadith deal directly or indirectly with the environment and the natural world. For example, “And He has made subservient to you [as a gift] from Himself and all that is in the universe and on the earth. In this, behold there are messages indeed for the people who think” (45:13). By endowing only humans with a creative mind, and thus the ability and responsibility to make conscious use of the natural world, God directs us toward a just, equitable, sustainable and prudent use of its limited natural resources so humanity can continue to exist.

Recognizing climate change’s impact and reality as an unprecedented global threat, in 2015 Muslim scholars and environmental leaders issued the Istanbul “Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change.” This document asks *all* Muslims to tackle the habits, mindsets and root causes of pollution, environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity.

Controlling global warming requires international governmental cooperation and commitment. But individual and community action is also necessary. Mosques and Islamic centers, along with the communities they serve, must do what they can to confront this ongoing reality.

ISNA’s Green Initiative Team is working to increase awareness and understanding, raise consciousness of Islam’s teachings in this regard, as well as our responsibility to care and protect Earth, and to promote Prophet Muhammad’s (*salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) eco-friendly practices. We have been entrusted with caring for our planet, through which God nourishes our bodies and soothes our souls. As such, interacting mindfully with our environment is yet another manifestation of our faith.

The ISNA Green Initiative Team has several modest goals:

- Promote the ideals and practices of a green Ramadan, “when less is more,” by following our Prophet’s example of keeping waste to a bare minimum. Today, this involves eliminating disposable plastic water bottles, Styrofoam and similar products, as well wasting as little food, water and other products as possible.
- Raise awareness of the need and our community’s responsibility to protect the

environment and promote restraint and conservation, including highlighting what climate change means for our planet and future generations.

- Promote the use of solar energy to reduce our use of and dependence on fossil fuels.
- Develop ways and measurable means to transform and retrofit mosques into environmentally friendly places and promote eco-friendlier lifestyles for Muslim communities.
- Build new mosques that meet the standards of green architecture.
- Promote environmental and social justice, especially in environmental justice communities.

GREEN RAMADAN CAMPAIGN

Unfortunately, the North American tradition of holding community-wide *iftars* and dinners results in a considerable amount of food and water being wasted and very few conservation and recycling efforts.

Since its inauguration in 2015, many mosques and Islamic centers, and even some abroad, have adopted its goals: to lift our spirits and deepen our eco-consciousness by encouraging less consumption, more conservation and promoting Ramadan’s blessing via beneficial social activities.

Specifically, the campaign directs mosques and households to:

- Eat more fruits and/or vegetables and less meat. Take only what you can comfortably finish, eat moderately, don't waste food and keep in mind the following hadith: Miqdam ibn Ma'd reported: "The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, 'The son of Adam cannot fill a vessel worse than his stomach, as it is enough for him to take a few bites to straighten his back. If he cannot do it, then he may fill it with a third of his food, a third of his drink, and a third of his breath'" ("Sunan al-Tirmidhi," hadith no. 2380).

DUE TO ITS STRONG BELIEF IN "TO CHANGE EVERYTHING WE NEED EVERYONE," THE SLOGAN FOR THE PEOPLES' CLIMATE MARCHES OF 2015 AND 2016, OUR TEAM ARGUES THAT CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS CAN SERVE AS THE CATALYST FOR NEEDED CHANGES. AS ALL OF US SHARE THIS PLANET AND A COMMON FUTURE, WE ARE WORKING WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND ACROSS FAITH COMMUNITIES.

- Recycle and minimize your use of plastic products, for their production requires large amounts of fossil fuels and most of them end up in landfills. Avoid using plastic water bottles, for an estimated 80% of them are not recycled. Use quick degradable and/or paper products. Bring your own utensils and avoid Styrofoam products, which are neither recyclable nor bio-degradable.

- Use energy-saver light bulbs, ensure your facility's energy efficiency and conserve water — even while making wudu'.

- Request your *khateeb* to deliver at least one *khutbah* during Ramadan on the Islamic imperative to conserve and protect the environment and perform socially beneficial deeds.

- Plant trees and vegetable gardens, and remember that planting a tree is a continuing charity ("Sahih al-Bukhari," hadith no. 2195, "Sahih Muslim," hadith no. 1553).

- Participate in civic activities, volunteer at homeless shelters and community social projects, collect items for food pantries, invite others to community and home dinners and don't forget the Muslim inmates in nearby jails.

PUBLICATIONS AND WEBINARS

ISNA Green Initiative's widely referenced "The Green Masjid Project," available online at ISNA Green Initiative – Islamic Society of North America, contains specific guidance for environmentally friendly practices. Every year we conduct webinars to raise awareness and provide guidance and direction.

ENERGY CONSERVATION PROMOTION

Many scientists contend that the burning of fossil fuels is the major cause of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere and a primary driver of climate change. In the U.S., roughly 80% of our energy comes

(<https://isna.net/isna-green-initiative/>). This historic partnership, launched at ISNA's 2020 annual convention, seeks to enable over 2,700 mosques and 300 Islamic schools nationwide to reduce their buildings' energy, water and operating expenses, as well as emissions, and pursue other sustainable initiatives.

In addition, we have partnered with GreenFaith and, in 2020, celebrated Faith Climate Action Week together with Interfaith Power and Light, which coincided with the Green Ramadan campaign.

ONGOING EFFORTS

- Become Eco-friendly. A mosque or Islamic center may earn an ISNA-certified environmentally friendly status by attaining a comprehensive set of achievements and measurable accomplishments. We are developing standards to help them do so.

- Green Architecture. These comprehensive standards will help Muslim communities that undertake future building projects make them eco-friendly.

- Environmental Justice. Climate change disproportionately impacts Black, Latino and Native American communities, which are the least responsible for global warming. Power plants, transfer stations, ports, superfund sites and mining operations for fuel resources place a significant environmental burden on the neighboring — and usually low-income — communities. But despite being directly and disproportionately affected by such facilities, they are rarely included in the discussion and decision-making processes.

For example, Blacks made up only 14% of Michigan's population, and yet the state's most heavily polluted zip code is 84% Black. ISNA's Green Initiative team plans to work closely with these communities to push this issue into the public's consciousness and to find ways to engender real solutions and justice for them.

- Protecting and Preserving the Environment. As both the Quran and Hadith emphasize these two activities as being central to Islam, our community's leaders must assume a leading role in adopting the relevant practices. Ideally, we suggest that our mosques and Islamic centers become spiritual centers that strengthen our faith and role models of community care and outreach programs, along with champions of the environment and protectors of the natural world. 

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from fossil fuels, 8% from nuclear energy and 12% from renewable resources. Formulating both clean and renewable energy solutions is critical to reaching a carbon-neutral — and ideally a carbon-free — future and reducing global warming.

Installing solar panels will also save a substantial amount of money over the long run. To learn more about solar energy and installing solar panel systems, please consult "Making the Best of a God-given Gift" (Islamic Horizons, May/June 2019, 40-41).

PARTNERING WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Due to its strong belief in "To change everything we need everyone," the slogan for the Peoples' Climate Marches of 2015 and 2016, our team argues that cross-sector partnerships can serve as the catalyst for needed changes. As all of us share this planet and a common future, we are working with other organizations and across faith communities.

For example, ISNA's Green Team worked closely with the Environmental Protection Agency to develop the "Energy STAR Action Workbook for Muslim Communities"