# Young Adults Call the Faithful on Climate

BY HUDA ALKAFF

The 2021 Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Young Adults Faithful Climate Action Fellowship (March-Nov. 2021; http://www.faithfulclimateaction.org/) is a collaborative interfaith fellowship program with Creation Justice Ministries, GreenFaith, Interfaith Power and Light, United Methodist Women and Wisconsin Green Muslims. It is supported by a US Climate Action Network collaborative grant.

The 2021 fellowship is a paid opportunity for BIPOC Christian or Muslim young adults (aged 18-26) living in the Midwest and Southeast who are concerned about the climate crisis. The cohort explores how faith traditions can support and guide our climate activism.

This year's fellows engaged in nine months of joint study, leadership training and action. From March through November 2021, they participated in monthly interactive webinars, were put in touch with young faith and climate leaders in their region and were guided by both peer leaders and professional mentors to develop their own voice as faith and climate activists. The fellows are responsible for publishing an op-ed, delivering a message to their faith community, and taking part in faith-based resource development. *ih*

Huda Alkaff is founder and director, Wisconsin Green Muslims

# Food for Thought

BY AFRAH YAFAI

Experts project that 42 million Americans, including 13 million children, will experience food insecurity in 2021. According to Feeding America (https://secure.feedingamerica.org), in 2019, food insecurity, at its lowest, affected 35 million people. Yet the amount of food waste in this country remains dangerously high, with more than $161 billion worth of food wasted each year — nearly 40% of all food.

What exactly *is* food waste? This term is defined as any food thrown away at homes, restaurants and stores. It is also common for crops to be left in fields due to low prices (less profit for farmers), transportation costs and if the crops don't meet the appearance

standards. So, when you hear "108 billion pounds of food is wasted in the U.S.," don't be shocked that this is a common occurrence. Wasted food either ends up decomposing in landfills or is incinerated.

However, both are detrimental to our health and environment. When food waste decomposes in a landfill, it releases methane, a greenhouse gas that is at least 28 times more potent than carbon dioxide, despite its shorter lifetime. Greenhouse gases trap heat in the atmosphere. Nitrous oxide and fluorinated gases are also present. Their effect on climate change depends on how much of them are in the atmosphere, how long they stay and how strong their impact is. Methane alone accounts for "about 10 percent of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions from human activities" (https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/overview-greenhouse-gases). If this doesn't scare you, just look at the most recent outbreaks of wildfires worldwide due to climate change and increased global warming.

According to the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA; (https://www.no-burn.org), 4.4 million Americans live within three miles of this country's 73 incinerators, and 79% of them are in low-income communities, which are often communities of color. The clearly discriminatory zoning policies target communities that are already very vulnerable, including children and the elderly. The Alliance's Precautionary Principle, which we must follow, states, "When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause-and-effect relationships are not fully established scientifically" (https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15968832/).

Not only does incineration pose a higher risk of cancer and other respiratory diseases, but it significantly contributes to the rise in global warming.

So why does any of this matter? Why am I spending my time explaining how human activities are a major contribution to climate change? In short, being a Muslim, it would be wrong of me to not care. It would violate my values and those of Prophet Muhammad (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), namely, justice and mercy, both of which are a core part of our faith: "The worshipers of the Most Gracious are those who tread the earth gently, and when the ignorant speak to them, they only utter peace" (25:63).

This can be interpreted in many ways;

# Congress Should Prioritize Climate Adaptation and Resilience to Strengthen Communities

## BY RAIHAN AMIR RASHIDI

This summer, we witnessed wildfires rage through the American West, stronger hurricanes storm the Gulf and East coasts, severe drought in the Upper Midwest and record-breaking high temperatures in the Pacific Northwest.

Clearly, extreme weather patterns are becoming highly unpredictable and more intense due to climate change. This affects people's lives and livelihoods, for these disasters destroy homes and crops and cause the public's health, as well as air and water quality, to deteriorate.

Although this is nothing new, some policymakers continue to stall or preempt urgent climate policies because they claim that the price tag of implementing policies to reverse these negative realities is "too high." The costs of continued inaction, however, far outweighs that of taking action.

Islam and many other faiths link the ecological crisis to humanity's ethics and values. The balance of our ecosystem has long been disrupted and, unfortunately, the overconsumption and overexploitation by a few have inflicted a disproportionate level of injustice upon the most vulnerable.

For a community to become resilient, it really comes down to centering justice at the foundation of climate adaptation and resilience strategies. Marginalized groups, such as communities of color, low-income, older, and disabled people, are more impacted by climate disasters than other communities.

On top of the global pandemic looming over our society, they also face greater barriers when it comes to recovering from power outages, housing displacements, mobility limitations and food shortages.

Community organizations have been key leaders in fostering climate justice on the local level. Last summer, Iowa experienced a *derecho* — a line of intense, widespread and fast-moving windstorms and sometimes thunderstorms that moves across a great distance and is characterized by damaging winds — that greatly impacted communities through the loss of power and even, for some, of their homes.

Cedar Rapids, a city in eastern Iowa, was the hardest hit. After the *derecho*, many individuals and organizations showed up to help its people recover.

"My sister-in-law works at a church in Cedar Rapids where they provided food, water and [other] supplies to their neighbors who had been hit by the *derecho*. They showed grace, care and compassion to anyone who needed help," says Irene DeMaris, associate director at Iowa Interfaith Power and Light.

A year later, Rama Muzo and his colleagues at the Intercultural Center of Iowa are still working hard to help those communities who were deeply impacted by the storm — mostly people of color, refugees and immigrants who live in poorly maintained buildings on the city's south side.

"[The disaster] shed light on the lack of investments and exacerbated the housing crisis in this part of the city. Our people are still struggling, and we are helping them secure good housing and employment, and ultimately build sustainable family health and wealth," says Muzo.

While faith and BIPOC leaders and organizations often step up to lift up their communities, lawmakers must finally begin to strategize and implement legislation that will ensure effective and long-term disaster preparedness on the local and state levels.

Climate adaptation and resilience strategies for cities and states can take the form of installing distributed solar panels in key locations like hospitals, schools or grocery stores to reduce reliance on power lines, which are vulnerable to extreme weather. This could be paired with battery

however, it is also simply telling us how to care for our people and planet and how to handle the ensuing backlash. We see taking care of Earth as a responsibility given to us by God, an *amana* (trust) that we must uphold and fulfill. So, when I'm told that issues of environmental justice aren't for me and are larger than me, I respectfully disagree. Yes, there are policies put in place made by public officials who socially hold more power than I do — that is a loaded statement.

However, because of who I am and what my faith teaches me, absolutely nothing can make me second guess my responsibility and capability. Islam is justice expressed not only through the words of God in the Quran, but also by the actions of Prophet Muhammad. He emphasized the importance of the rights of women and children, liberation from slavery and debt, and standing up for those who felt overshadowed.

It's normal to feel despair when looking at the issues surrounding our world today. But, as Muslims, we believe that any injustice will be dealt with on the Day of Resurrection, when everyone will be held accountable for what they did while living on this planet. This doesn't mean that we should lay back and wait for God to deal with this, for we are required to care about these matters. It is our faith.

As Abu Sa'id al-Khudri narrates: "Whosoever of you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith" ("Sahih Muslim"). This emphasizes the importance of acting against injustice, even if the most you can do is to hate it within your heart.

While discussing the command to be merciful in his paper "Mercy, The Stamp of Creation" (https://www.theoasisinitiative.org/nawawi-mercy), Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah states: "In imitation of the Prophet [peace be upon him], Muslims are expected to be merciful, to bring good, and to seek the benefit of others ..." He emphasizes that he and other commentators point out that this mercy is not exclusive to Muslims, but is for the believing and unbelieving, and our mercy extends beyond humans. We are commanded to be merciful to animals, birds, plants, trees and to everything on Earth.

To not be merciful is to go against what God has commanded of us — to care and show respect for all the blessings that God has bestowed upon us. And this is the beauty of Islam. ih

Afrah Yafai, a student at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, was a fellow with the 2021 Faithful Climate Action Fellowship.

storage to serve as a backup generator. This system played an important role in Puerto Rico's recovery after Hurricane Maria ravaged the island in September 2017.

Other efforts include developing stormwater management practices, such as promoting natural buffers that control soil erosion and reduce flooding impacts. Policymakers must also begin to understand the wisdom behind increased funding for emergency services, especially in rural areas, as well as community centers that provide shelter and sustenance.

The budget reconciliation package currently being negotiated in Congress includes provisions related to the physical, natural and social infrastructures that not only better prepare communities for disasters, but also reduce climate change's various impacts.

Congress needs to follow through with this legislation, as this is a rare opportunity to ensure a sustainable future for our communities and younger generations.

After decades of ignorance and inaction, it's long past time that lawmakers put people and the planet first and choose justice and compassion over all other concerns. ih

Raihan Amir Rashidi was a fellow with the 2021 Faithful Climate Action Fellowship