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Faith leaders have 'widest reach' on environment

Trevor Gundy Religion News Service | Nov. 5, 2009

LONDON -- United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon told religious leaders Nov.3 that they are uniquely equipped to pressure secular leaders to combat climate change.

Ban made the speech at a three-day conference on faith and the environment in England, organized by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation and the United Nations Development Program.

Ban told around 200 leaders representing nine of the world's major religious communities, ?The world's great faith communities occupy a unique position in discussion on the fate of our planet and the accelerating impacts of climate change. You are the leaders who have the largest, widest and deepest reach.?

With ARC co-founder Prince Philip of England looking on, Ban said, ?We have the know-how, we have resources, but the only vacuum is political will. You can inspire, you can provoke, you can challenge your leaders, through your wisdom, through your followers.?

Ban said that the major faiths have established, run, or contribute to more than half of all schools worldwide, compose the third largest category of investors in the world, and produce more weekly magazines and newspapers than all the secular press in the European Union.
?Your potential impact is enormous,? he said. ?You can -- and do -- inspire people to change.?

The U.N. head noted that the world's poorest are also the least responsible for the emissions in the atmosphere yet ?the most likely to suffer first and foremost? from the impact of climate change.
Ban's remarks come as world leaders prepare for a conference next month in Copenhagen, Denmark, on the environment.

Faith groups, Ban said, speak to the heart of humanity's deepest needs. ?This is why the voices, the deeds and the teachings of the world's faith groups are so vitally important. In the coming weeks I urge you to make your voices heard loud and clear,? Ban stated.

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