

Press release
For immediate release

ICLEI part of global network pledging to green pilgrimages

Assisi, Italy, November 3 2011 - A ban on cars on pilgrimage routes; solar panels for cathedral roofs; provision of fresh clean, water for pilgrims, and the planting of thousands of trees around sacred sites - these are just some of the initiatives which the founder members of the Green Pilgrimage Network pledged to implement yesterday. ICLEI Secretariats in both the Europe and Southern Asia are involved in the Network, which is the first in the world aimed at greening pilgrimage.

Secretary-General of Alliance of Religion and Conservation (ARC) one of the main organisers, Martin Palmer said, "Cities from China to Norway and faiths from all around the world today commit to making one of the most powerful religious experiences – pilgrimage – a living witness to a commitment to protect our living planet."

Around 100 million people go on pilgrimage each year, according to the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. Such huge movements of people inevitably cause environmental problems around the world's sacred places. Pilgrimage sites that once had 1,000 people a week arriving mostly on foot are now handling tens of thousands of people descending by coach or car, and requiring refreshments that are not only spiritual.

This places pressure on water and food supplies, sewage and waste disposal, accommodation and energy resources, while the carbon emissions involved in travel to pilgrim sites inevitably carries an environmental impact. The Network will strive to help the many faiths make their sacred sites and pilgrim cities as environmentally sustainable as possible. The launch event took place at the Sacred Land conference, where more than 90 delegates from around the world, representing all the major faiths converged.

The Hajj remains the biggest annual pilgrimage, with around two million Muslim pilgrims travelling to Mecca in Saudi Arabia each year. The beauty of places like this risks being damaged, as does their wildlife and biodiversity. This is important as sacred places are often also places with vital biodiversity, usually because their religious value over the centuries has protected them from development.

The Green Pilgrimage Network will bring faith and city representatives together to green sacred places, and will also reach out to pilgrims themselves to encourage them to 'tread lightly upon the Earth' – both at home and on their journeys.

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Background:

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is an international association of local governments and national and regional local government organisations. ICLEI currently has more than 1,200 members worldwide, of which 200 are in Europe. Founded in 1990, ICLEI provides technical guidance, training, and information services to build capacity, share knowledge, and support local governments in the implementation of sustainable development at the local level.

Founder members of the **Green Pilgrimage Network** include sacred sites or pilgrim cities from 10 faith traditions, including two in the UK; St Albans (the Church of England) and Luss, Loch Lomond (the Church of Scotland). Others range as far afield as Louguan in the People's Republic of China for Daoists to Kano in Nigeria for followers of Islam's Qadiriyyah Sufi tradition. The city authorities of Jerusalem, a pilgrimage destination for three faiths – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – will join the network to green the city for all pilgrims.

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