

The contribution of Islam to planetary health



The human ecosystem interface, embodied by the planetary health paradigm, is deeply embedded in all the world's religions and indigenous traditions.¹ Yet, the ongoing planetary health discourse remains predominantly Western-orientated. As calls to decolonise health ensue, there is a need to explore and acknowledge other non-Western perspectives, such as those originating from the Islamic faith.²

Preserving nature is a key value repeatedly emphasised in the Quran, the central religious text of Islam. With the word Earth mentioned 485 times, the Quran teaches that the attainment of harmony between humanity and ecosystems is an integral component of one's faith in God. Not only does Islam prohibit the exploitation and destruction of natural resources, but Islamic teachings also emphasise the important role of humans as stewards of the planet with an ethical and moral obligation to preserve and restore the environment.³ The Islamic law, *maqasid al-shariah*, invokes the aim to serve the public's interest and to protect all forms of life from harm, governed by the principles and concepts of mercy and guidance.⁴ Instead of profit maximisation and natural resource exploitation, the law advocates for small-scale and people-centred development that meets essential needs and diminishes humanity's ecological footprint.⁵

As an ecoeducational resource, the Quran provides a comprehensive description of how nature works and calls for the responsible and ethical use of natural resources, marked by moderation and concern for equity and devoid of waste, as shown in the following passage: "It is He who has brought into being gardens, the cultivated and the wild, and date-palms, and fields with produce of all kinds, and olives and pomegranates, similar (in-kind) and variegated. Eat of their fruit in season, but give (the poor) their due on harvest day. And do not waste, for God does not love the wasteful." (Quran 6:141).

Additionally, several Hadiths, which are verbally transmitted records of the Prophet Muhammad's words, also highlighted the paramount importance of environmental protection. One of these Hadiths emphasised the interconnectedness of nature and the rewards of preserving it: if a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats

from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (*sadaqah*) for him.⁶

In the contemporary world, religious leaders from different faiths have also reiterated the message of planetary health embedded in ancient holy books. For instance, human stewardship is further underscored by Islamic leaders, who called on the world's 1.6 billion Muslims to take action on climate change, as a constitutional part of their religious duty. This collective call was translated into an Islamic Declaration on Climate Change adopted in Istanbul in 2015, which includes a set of commitments to phase out greenhouse gas emissions and to invest in net-zero carbon solutions.⁷ Furthermore, some countries are starting to use Islamic narratives and religious teaching to address planetary health issues such as climate change by organising ecoislamic conferences that elucidate Islam's environment-friendly principles. Such conferences have taken place in diverse countries such as Pakistan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia.⁸ In addition, Islamic universities in Indonesia have already integrated environmental health education in the design and implementation of their curricula to prepare students in leading environmental action in their own communities.⁹

Taking climate action and protecting planetary health are essential imperatives for the world's Muslims, as many Muslim-majority countries are already experiencing the devastating effects of climate change, especially on human health. For example, due to continuous deforestation and land conversion for palm oil production, Indonesia has emerged as one of the top 20 carbon emitters in the world. Moreover, the forest fires generated by land conversion activities have produced transboundary air pollution that affected its nearby countries in southeast Asia.¹⁰ Meanwhile, in the Middle East, the frequency and severity of sand and dust storms have drastically increased over the years due to climate change, and prolonged drought and unsustainable land management, particularly in Iran, has led to the loss of over USD \$13 billion in Gross Domestic Product every year.¹¹

Despite these existing initiatives and tangible climate impacts on Muslim communities there is an urgent need to further advance Islamic environmentalism in

Muslim countries and across the world. The Islamic faith offers substantial opportunities to advance action for planetary health. That is why we call on all Islamic leaders, scholars, and institutions to advocate for planetary health and promote sustainable Islamic values. We further extend our call to the planetary health community to welcome and amplify Islamic and other faith-based voices and responses to planetary health. Now is the time for the Muslim world to embody their duty as trustees of the Earth and join the global mobilisation for planetary health.

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