

Transcript of Remarks by Sheikh Ali Gomaa, former Grand Mufti of Egypt

Sheikh Gomaa's remarks were part of "Care for Our Common Planet: A Catholic-Muslim Earth Day Conversation." Watch the full conversation online: https://youtu.be/FJ4-FuEU_yA

His keynote remarks begin at 43:42

In the name of Allah, I would like to welcome you all, brothers and sisters, and I would like to thank you very much.

I would like to speak theoretically about the position of a human being to the earth, especially on this special day (Earth Day). Secondly, I will talk about the initiatives that have launched from this theoretical impression.

In Islam, all worship Allah or God, and we, in our belief in Allah, we are all part of this planet. So, all animals, birds in the skies, and also the Earth, we are all, praise to Allah and worship Allah, are all in need of the lord.

The feeling of the Muslims here that this planet around us, they are all supplicated to Allah . . . and from here we see the aesthetic morals and values that we raise up our children to deal with kindness, as kindness is the key for Allah's satisfaction. The first Hadith we teach to our kids: You need to have mercy for what is on the earth so Allah can have mercy on you. So the first principle is mercy for all the creatures around us. This is the theoretical principle. . . .

Also, the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, told us how to love this planet. . . . the earth is the source of our food, the source of our medicine, the source of our growth, the source of our houses. For all come from the earth, and most of them consider the earth as part of this system. Also, for the current system, some people say "the earth is not part of this production system." But no: People need to protect this earth. There are many verses from the Holy Qur'an that I quoted in my book on the environment, which was translated into the English language and also there are a lot of Hadith, or texts, related to water, air, or even fighting pollution. Here we talk about all types of pollution. So, Islam here always invites us to protect the environment.

We have cooperated with our brothers, the Catholics, and also with people from all over the globe. For more than 25 years, we have been collaborating to protect the environment and to try to restore this environment to its previous glory. We worked on human development, because we perceive of this in our religion: Religion has a major role to play, and a very important role to play. And therefore, we need to continue this effort, because the best of deeds are the most sustainable ones. So, if we do something consistently, we will see the outcome. And this is the key point, that the universe is worshipping Almighty Allah, and remembers Almighty Allah, and that we are fully aligned with the universe. Almighty Allah created this universe for all of humanity. That is why we need to deal with the university gently. We need also to contemplate and to enjoy the beauty of nature as created by Almighty Allah,

praise be to him. We need to avoid spreading mischief on the earth, whether we are talking about the life of animals or plants, or the pinnacle of creation—that is, human beings.

This perception and this concept make us move forward to the second point, which is launching initiatives. These initiatives should pay attention to the welfare of people, of animals, of the entire planet to ensure that it becomes a more valid environment and even a more efficient environment and more ready to ensure prosperity for humanity. This is one of the objectives of religion. And also, prosperity and happiness in the afterlife on our pathway to Almighty Allah is another religious objective. That is why we have the famous saying in Islam, “To be happy in both worlds, in this life and the afterlife.” So, this is something that also includes happiness in this world. We need to combat diseases and control poverty and reduce ignorance. We need to ensure that we protect our environment so that it becomes a sound environment. These initiatives, we establish for them a number of establishments and institutions in our countries . . . all of them seek to achieve a single objective, which is ensuring prosperity for people and everything around them. We have established a number of institutions which launch initiatives. We counted those initiatives. There are more than 130. All of them include, at the end of the day, a main objective, which is protecting humanity, protecting the planet, protecting the environment.

We are supplicating to Almighty Allah to enable us to continue this approach and this journey, because this is a journey that will take us towards happiness. We have an open heart and we walk with an open heart, and Catholics are our brothers and sisters. We have been collaborating with them for a long period of time. Yet, we need to point out that we, and Catholics, only represent four billion out of eight billion [people]. So we are also dealing with an open heart with the other four billion people who are neither Catholics nor Muslims. We are open to dealing kindly with all human beings, since Almighty Allah created them and Almighty Allah loves them. So our main concept is love and compassion. Our main concept and main approach is gentleness, and being able to join hands to achieve what is good, and not to join hands to do evil.

I’m very happy to be with you today on this wonderful evening. I would like to thank all those who have organized this webinar. I would like to wish you all the best and wish you many happy returns, and I hope that every year, we will take one more step on a long journey. It may be an endless journey—it may not have an end because it will continue as long as life exists. Thank you very much for listening.

At 1:21:15, Sheikh Gomaa responds to an audience question on what meaningful interfaith engagement might look like:

We did a few initiatives in collaboration between Muslims and Catholics, like looking after and serving and looking after deaf and hearing-impaired people, and some initiatives related to the environment, like cleanness and spreading the concept of dealing with the environment, and how to clean your environment. Another initiative also, which is related to what we are saying now, was fighting the idea of female sexual harassment, because we need to spread

community peace. Also, we have around 130 initiatives . . . how to, for example, fight unemployment in the community by opening new ways for jobs and employment. In collaboration between Muslims and Christians, we've formed charity organizations. . . . We talk about art, and also people with disabilities, and we have formed many initiatives, and they are all helping to build [up] human being and to establish a good environment around human beings so that they are happier are more prosperous.

At 1:45:15, Sheikh Gomaa responds to a question about how the faith communities of the world can unite to get the greatest polluters in the world to change their ways (for example, the fossil fuel industry):

I believe that this is something that is difficult to achieve and that we may not really make this an objective, because behind those pollutants and those polluters, behind them, they are supported by money. They are doing this to earn money. And what is driven by the greed for financial gains, it is difficult to target it directly. That is why, if we want to eradicate this phenomenon, we should be able to besiege this phenomenon itself and use drama and use the media and use different media platforms, and this continuous effort against polluting activities could shape public opinion in this regard. But we should not consider them a viable target for us.

This is something that will be hard to obtain in a single step. This is something that should be done or accomplished via a number of steps. We should not view this as the short-term objective, nor the primary objective for us. We should have a plan, a long-term plan, to be able to besiege those pollutants and those polluters, and not to eradicate them directly, because they are seeking to obtain financial gains and this is something that is ingrained in their nature, and they will not allow and they will be fighting this ferociously.