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- [Events](#)
- [News](#)
  - [Faith organizations assess COP 20 on the way to Paris](#)
- [News in other languages](#)
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- [Request for an interview](#)

## Faith organizations assess COP 20 on the way to Paris

28 January 2015

**Outcomes, disappointments, as well as encouraging signs from the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 20) and the Peoples Summit held late last year in Lima, Peru, were discussed at length by representatives of faith communities in a panel hosted by the World Council of Churches (WCC).**

The event on 27 January in Geneva, Switzerland, featured, among others, panellists Valeriane Bernard of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, Curtis Doebbler, an academic and lawyer from International-Lawyers.org, Budi Tjahjono, advocacy officer for the Franciscans International and Guillermo Kerber, WCC programme executive for Care for Creation and Climate Justice.

The speakers, invited by the Geneva Interfaith Forum on Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights shared experiences, best practices, strategies and lessons learned concerning how they may rejuvenate efforts for global climate justice ahead of the COP 21 to be held end of this year in Paris.

The panel was moderated by Beatriz Schulthess from Costa Rica, co-president of Religions for Peace and president of the Indigenous Peoples Ancestral Spiritual Council. In her remarks at the session, she highlighted the work done by Religions for Peace in Lima, including a joint side event held by the organization in cooperation with the WCC.

Speaking about the outcomes of COP 20 in Lima, Guillermo Kerber said that despite certain disappointments with the outcome reflected in the “Lima call for climate action,” there are still “signs of hope” triggered by civil society and religious organizations who are calling for concrete actions towards an effective and binding climate agreement to be approved at COP 21 in Paris.

Kerber highlighted commitments made by the European Union, China and the United States to reduce carbon emissions, contributions towards the Green Climate Fund, and the relevance of loss and damage associated with countries vulnerable to the impact of climate change, as well as calls by UN Special Procedures and civil society to include a clear reference to human rights in the draft for Paris.

Kerber also expressed appreciation for the role of youth, especially the Latin American and Caribbean Secretariat of the World Student Christian Federation, the Methodist and other local churches, as well as the Inter-Religious Council of Peru. These organizations, he said, hosted ecumenical and interfaith initiatives, including a one-day conference at the Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, with a round table on eco-theology and interfaith cooperation, and an interfaith celebration in front of the Saint Francis Basilica in Lima.

Valeriane Bernard emphasized the side events organized by faith based organizations and the interfaith coordination at COP 20, trying to bring various faith based initiatives together, including the Fast for the Climate campaign.

Curtis Doebbler made a detailed analysis of the “Lima call for climate action,” citing both its positive and negative contents. He also stressed the hard work to be done by ADP (Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action), part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process. The group will meet in Geneva in two weeks’ time. Doebbler also encouraged participants to be engaged in the



Participants in a panel discussion on COP 20 held at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva.

Sustainable Development Goals discussions, where Goal 13 reads, “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”.

Budi Tjahjono stressed the place of climate change at the Human Rights Council, where, for instance, at its next session in March a whole day of high level panels will address the relationship between human rights and climate change.

Participants, including mainly representatives of Geneva based diplomatic missions, NGOs and faith based organizations, stressed the relevance of having a closer look at the process and further engagement in the preparations for COP 21 in Paris.

**Pilgrims of climate justice plan to impact COP 21 in Paris** (WCC news release of 23 January 2015)

**Climate change and human rights at the heart of the WCC’s work at COP 20** (WCC news release of 12 December 2014)

**WCC’s work on climate justice and care for creation**



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