

Jain Declaration on the Climate Crisis

In 1990, Indian former High Commissioner to the UK and member of parliament, L. M. Singhvi, wrote the “Jain Declaration on Nature” which outlined the fundamental teachings of the Jain religion and its inextricable connection to the preservation of nature. ¹As stated there, “waste and creating pollution are acts of violence”.

Almost 30 years later, there is an urgent need for action on the climate crisis. We set forth this declaration to add our voices to those of other faith communities and sectors of the global community.

Jainism is one of the world’s oldest religions, having originated in Northern India well before 500 BCE and, as underscored by “The Jain Declaration on Nature”, it is an ecological religion whose philosophies and codes of conduct inherently provide solutions to address our current crisis of global heating and extreme weather events.

The principal tenet of conduct followed by Jains is that of *Ahimsa* or non-violence to any living being. As a result, practicing Jains are vegetarians and have a long history of building sanctuaries for injured animals. Jains teachings prohibit Jains from engaging in professions that harm plants, animals and the earth. Another key tenet followed by Jains is *Aparigraha* (non-possessiveness), to limit one’s consumption and material possessions. *Ahimsa* and *Aparigraha* as taught and traditionally practiced have great relevance to the climate crisis.

Other aspects of Jain philosophy are exemplified by the traditional teaching: *Paraspara Pagraho Jivanam* ²meaning all life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence, or as an alternate translation, souls render service to each other. It is not only the human perspective that we must consider, but those of all living beings. Therefore, it is important to live in harmony, and not attempt to dominate nature or other living beings. We encourage the world community to act now, so we can avert catastrophe and take better care of our world.

The Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA (www.jaina.org)) is the umbrella organization of 70 North American Jain centers established in the USA and Canada representing 150,000 Jains in North America. JAINA recognizes the extreme threat that climate change poses to all life on Earth. We ask member Jains and their communities in North America, as well as other Jains and Jain communities throughout the world, to sign on to this Declaration on Climate Change in order to make a public commitment to action. We hope that those outside the Jain community will also find inspiration and solidarity in this declaration.

Climate change in 2019

The burning of massive quantities of fossil fuels to build and run modern society has increased the concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere from preindustrial levels of 280 parts per million (PPM) to over 415 PPM in 2019. ³ The CO₂ molecules in the atmosphere trap energy from the sun. Since approximately 1900, the average temperature of the Earth’s surface has increased by 1 degree Celsius due to warming by greenhouse gases. JAINA affirms the overwhelming (99%) consensus position of climate scientists that human activities are the main cause of global warming, primarily

¹ https://www.jainelibrary.org/elib_master/article/250000_article_english/jain_declaration_of_nature_269753_data.pdf

² Jain aphorism from the Tattvārtha Sūtra [5.21]

³ <https://www.co2.earth/daily-co2>

through the burning of fossil fuels and use of animal agriculture. JAINA asserts that we must act quickly so as to avert irreversible damage. ⁴

Climate change affects all of us living beings on the planet, causing death, displacement, disease, and other types of suffering with the worst effects falling on the most vulnerable. For example:

- Higher temperatures have wreaked havoc on the ability of plants and animals to survive in environments that are changing faster than individuals and species can adapt. Tens of thousands of plant and animal species are going extinct every year due to habitat loss and changing climate. We are in the 6th major extinction event in the last 485 million years. This one is being caused by human activity presenting a very grave situation. ⁵
- Thousands of humans die every year due to hotter conditions and from extreme heat events, Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year, from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress. ⁶
- Most of the extra CO₂ and heat has been absorbed by the oceans, creating stress and dangerous living conditions for marine life ⁷. With sea levels rising due to melting glaciers and hotter ocean temperatures, low lying areas are flooding. Warmer ocean temperatures are also adding extra energy to hurricanes making them ever more destructive⁸. Forests are getting drier and wildfires are becoming increasingly more prevalent and destructive ⁹. These climatic changes cause people and animals to be displaced. Mass displacement and migration could challenge societies worldwide.
- Climate change affects social and environmental determinants of health – clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and secure shelter. Air pollution, increased allergic and asthma symptoms, decreasing food security and mental distress are health consequences caused or exacerbated by climate change.¹⁰
- In addition, changes in the climate have already changed the geographic distribution of pathogen carrying mosquitoes and increased the risk of diseases such as malaria, and West Nile, dengue and Zika viruses ¹¹.

This is an abhorrent and untenable situation. We must do all that we can to avoid preventable suffering.

⁴<https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/ga12131.doc.htm>

⁵ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/prehistoric-world/mass-extinction/#close>

⁶ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

⁷ "Ocean warming dominates the increase in energy stored in the climate system, accounting for more than 90% of the energy accumulated between 1971 and 2010 (*high confidence*), with only about 1% stored in the atmosphere." IPCC, 2014: *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, R.K. Pachauri and L.A. Meyer (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 151 pp.

⁸ <https://scied.ucar.edu/hurricanes-and-climate-change> "There's evidence that over this century anthropogenic climate change will cause more intense tropical cyclones globally."

⁹ Figures 2.4 and SPM.4 IPCC, 2014: *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, R.K. Pachauri and L.A. Meyer (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 151 pp.

¹⁰ <https://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/effects/default.htm>

¹¹ <https://news.stanford.edu/2019/03/15/effect-climate-change-disease/> "Economic development and cooler temperatures have largely kept mosquito-borne diseases out of wealthier Northern Hemisphere countries, but climate change promises to tip the scales in the other direction."

Actions of the Jain community to address climate change: beyond tradition

The Jain principle of Ahimsa (non-violence) naturally makes Jainism a religion of environmental protection. Practicing Jains are vegetarians. Considering the harm that results from dairy farming to cows who are forcibly impregnated, separated from their newborn calves and eventually slaughtered when no longer deemed “productive,” Jains are increasingly going beyond vegetarianism to eliminate dairy products and adopt completely vegan diets. While avoiding meat is an important way to decrease our contribution to climate change, dairy farming also has tremendous environmental impacts, via the land and water inputs required, the methane and other pollution produced, as well as the proliferation of baby calves in order to keep the mother cows lactating and producing milk. We recognize that adopting a vegan or whole foods plant-based diet is increasingly recognized as both health promoting and a key part, perhaps the most effective individual action, to solve the climate crisis. ^{12, 13, 14, 15}

Beyond our individual choices, we recognize the importance of transforming our agricultural system so that we do not raise animals for food ¹⁶. We also seek to stop polluting the environment with chemical fertilizers and pesticides and using the by-products of animal exploitation in farming.

Jains are also encouraged to consider their choices of energy sources and transportation as a way to practice ahimsa. Our ascetic community of *sadhvis* and *sadhus* (nuns and monks) traditionally avoid use of electricity and modes of transportation other than walking. The Jain understanding of karma extends responsibility for an action not only to a person who directly causes harm but also to one that indirectly causes harm. So, anyone who drives a fossil fuel automobile or has frequent air travel bears some responsibility for increased wildfires and hurricanes. Recognizing the harm from greenhouse gas emissions, a number of Jain temples in North America have also begun to install solar panels.

The Jain principle of Aparigraha (non-possessiveness) also naturally makes Jainism a religion of environmental protection because creating all the material goods (stuff) that people own and use requires the mining of raw materials and the expenditure of energy which is usually derived from fossil fuels. Manufacturing also creates vast quantities of waste byproducts which are often toxic. The resources of 3 to 5 planet earths, using current mining and production processes, are required to give everyone the current standard of living of people in industrialized Western countries ¹⁷. We recognize that a pervasive culture of consumerism and greed is driving people to want larger homes and larger cars. Jains realized thousands of years ago that, beyond the necessities, owning more material goods does not make people happier and often causes harm to other living beings. Therefore, the Jain code of conduct for nuns and monks limits their possessions to sparse clothing and food containers. Jain lay people are taught to minimize their possessions. We recognize that the stuff that people buy contributes greatly to their carbon footprints. We exhort all people to strive diligently to reduce their consumption and therefore their carbon footprints.

¹² Health and nutritional aspects of sustainable diet strategies and their association with environmental impacts: a global modelling analysis with country-level detail The Lancet Planetary Health 2018

¹³ <https://www.drawdown.org/solutions/food/plant-rich-diet>

¹⁴ “Livestock and Climate Change”, Robert Goodland and Jeff Anhang, 2009, www.worldwatch.org/files/pdf/Livestock%20and%20Climate%20Change.pdf

or

https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6704/c7a0777c82357704d82b9ae8007c1197cb07.pdf?_ga=2.67336919.753748564.1571431414-975837659.1566608143

¹⁵ The Cowspiracy Climate Change Truth Webinar”, Shailesh Rao, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bj6C4ktfyyk>

¹⁶ “Livestock’s Long Shadow”, UN FAO 2006, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-a0701e.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-33133712>

We Jains invite everyone to make individual choices such as those below to reduce our contribution to climate change:

- Use a carbon footprint calculator to understand and reduce our negative impact on the environment.¹⁸
- Abstain from meat, eggs, and dairy products thereby minimizing use of water and avoiding toxic animal waste and methane
- Minimize food waste in our homes
- Transition to a lifestyle that relies less on car ownership e.g. walking, biking, car sharing and maximizes the use of public transportation
- If we must drive, do so using hybrid or fully electric vehicles, or at least choose very efficient fossil fuel cars and reduce our carbon emitting road trips
- Reduce our air travel
- Live in smaller homes, use energy saving technologies and use renewable energy sources such as solar
- Buy and own fewer material goods, refusing what we don't need, reducing what we use, recycling what we can and disposing of the little trash that we generate in a way that minimally hurts other living beings
- Consider how our work or business can benefit the climate for all living beings

We ask our Jain communities to commit to the following actions:

- Continue to educate ourselves and our children about the climate crisis, both in our temples and communities and in our secular schools and workplaces
- Serve only vegan food and use only vegan items in rituals such as *aartis* and *pujas*.¹⁹ in temples
- Minimize food waste in our community events
- Consider the availability of public transportation in the planning of where to locate temples and conventions
- Facilitate the arrangement of carpools for people to get to the temple while minimizing greenhouse gas emissions and ensure availability of nearby electric car chargers
- Eliminate the use of polystyrene and single use plastics in serving of food; use reusable plates and cutlery where possible and otherwise use compostable or biodegradable products only, so as to minimize waste in our landfills
- Use energy saving technologies and renewable energy such as electricity rather than natural gas for cooking and solar energy to power our temples

We also add our voices to the global environmental movement to promote national and global policies to reduce emission of greenhouse gases and reverse climate change. We agree with climate scientists that CO2 concentrations need to return to below 350 parts per million in the atmosphere in order to prevent human and animal suffering from natural catastrophes, such as fires, massive hurricanes, droughts and flooding of low lying lands, mass migration, civil unrest and other likely consequences of the climate crisis.

We follow the tradition of ahimsa, and the example of Mahatma Gandhi in using *satyagraha* for nonviolent social change.

¹⁸ For example, www.terrapass.org or <https://www.conservation.org/carbon-footprint-calculator>

¹⁹ For example, using almond or coconut oil in place of ghee, and using soya, almond or any other plant milk in place of cow's milk

Therefore, we propose that business and government leaders:

- Demonstrate in our policies and institutions, that we value peace and health of all living beings rather than allowing some to benefit at the expense of others.
- Facilitate the transition to agriculture that supports all living beings, reverses the process of global heating and associated extreme weather events, and supports regeneration
- Remove subsidies for the meat and dairy industries, eliminate favorable treatment for fertilizer and pesticide companies and incentivize the research and development of agricultural practices that use no chemical pollutants or byproducts of animal cruelty
- Remove subsidies for fossil fuels in order to facilitate the transition away from them and impose a price on carbon that accounts for the external extraction, transportation and burning costs to society from those fuels
- Invest in public transportation using renewable technologies, including high speed rail systems, and plan living areas for walkability and bicycle safety
- Ban non-biodegradable plastic and incentivize green alternatives in business
- Protect living beings on undeveloped land from deforestation and exploitation
- Support practices and vetted technologies to actively remove CO2 from the atmosphere, including massive reforestation as well as research and development of new technologies

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Statement Drafted by the JAINA Ahimsak Eco-Vegan Committee

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The undersigned individuals and Jain communities (sanghas) endorse this Declaration:

Statement Approved by the JAINA Executive Committee on Oct 17, 2019