

## **Ethics, Ecology & the Interdependent Web.**

**Report by Richard Boeke, Chair, British Chapter, IARF  
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Single-minded pursuit of one goal can damage or destroy other goals equally valuable. As we use corn to produce fuel, the price of food doubles for millions. A 2010 book, THE NEW HOLY WARS describes the battle of "Economic Religion vs Environmental Religion." As we use corn to produce fuel, the price of food doubles for hundreds of millions. As millions of hectares are destroyed for profit, how can we save the ecosystem of animals and our planet?

This was the theme of a February 2011 Conference in Croydon, England, sponsored by the International Association for Religious Freedom [www.iarf.net](http://www.iarf.net) and the World Congress of Faiths [www.worldfaiths.org](http://www.worldfaiths.org). The Conference was inspired by Datuk Leslie Davidson, who received the 2008 Merdeka Award for his service to the people of Malaysia. Davidson may have done as much to feed the world as any other human being alive today. Where Jesus provided the loaves and the fishes, Leslie has helped provide cooking oil for billions, while conserving much of the forest (Datuk is an honour similar to knighthood).

Leslie, a Unitarian in Ditchling, Sussex, has written, EAST of KINABALU, a book of insight and humour on his work in developing Palm Oil Plantations in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo. It is a adventure story with cartoons, water skiing with Crocodiles, and closing with evidence that palm oil can both help feed billions and save much of the jungle. "The oil palm produces 28% of the world's output of vegetable oil from only 4% of the world's planted area of oil crops. It produces ten times more oil per hectare and provides twenty times more employment per hectare than soy beans." (p. 317).\* His plantation was a model of religious pluralism: "We had a mixture of religions - Muslims, Buddhists, Taoists, Hindus, Christians, and animist pagans. ... and yet everybody lived in complete harmony." (p 175).

Charanjit Singh chaired the morning panel on Interdependence. BBC Commentator Rev. Peter Owen Jones opened telling us that Christianity as it is practiced is ruthlessly earnest in being ANTHROPOCENTRIC. Christian Scripture and Ritual is human centred. Yet we are called to build not just a Habitat for Humanity, but a Habitat for all life. "If we have a loving ecological base for God, this changes the entire way we live." An excited discussion followed.

British IARF Secretary Peter Sampson said, "The great villain of the human drama is the politics - not just war, but our war on the natural world. Stand against both wars." Fittingly, the next speakers were VINOD KAPASHI from the JAIN RELIGION of reverence for all life, and Leslie Kemp telling of the Buddhist teaching of INTERDEPENDENCE. He told us of his first time in a guild, "a wonderful sensation of being one with the world." The core of Buddhist life lies in action: to be totally at harmony with the life of the universe.

Croydon Unitarian Church provided good space for our "bring and share lunch break." Thanks to Peter Tayler, Pauline Peet, and Christine Walsh who set up. Thanks to Jean Kemp who practiced her Buddhism by serving and cleaning up for our 3 dozen participants.

WCF International Secretary Imam Abduljalil Sajid chaired the afternoon panel. Datuk Davidson led off the afternoon panel by teaching us the importance of insects in pollination for oil palms, and for most plants.

While in England this year, the government considered selling off much of the National Forest to help cover the budget, in Borneo we are well on the way to stopping the destruction of forests. Jean Leston from the World Wildlife Fund warned us that in natural resources, we are like a family spending 15,000 pounds a year, while our income is only 10,000 pounds a year. The pressure of growing population is turning ancient jungles in the Bangladesh Delta into thousands of small farms. The rising CO2 levels from coal, oil, and gas bring global warming. As the ice caps continue to melt, rising ocean levels will destroy 1,000s of farms in Bangladesh and around the world.

What can we do?

- We can support sustainable agriculture which also preserves most jungles and forests.
- We can eat less meat and buy locally produced food.
- We can use public transportation, walk, and move to electric cars for short journeys.
- We can live more simply. With love for the environment.

WCF President Rev. Dr. Marcus Braybrooke closed our discussion of Ethics and Ecology by asking us "To see ourselves as part of the natural world, not the rulers of it."

\*EAST OF KINABALU: by Datum Leslie Davidson (2nd Edition) published by the Inc. Society of Planters, Kuala Lumpur. Copies

available in UK from Datum L. Davidson, 101 East End Lane, Ditchling, Sussex, BN6 8UR: Price £10 (plus P&P UK £2.85 - Overseas £7.00).

- Davidson's recent article SAVE THE JUNGLES. HOW? PLANT PALM OIL, gives the current figure, "Palm Oil produces 34% of the world's major vegetable oils in under 5% of the planted area under oil crops."

\* Leslie Davidson - his work establishing Oil Palms in Malaysia is helping to feed millions.  
He also supports the WWF in jungle reserves for Orang-utans.