



Article

The Threat to Sacred Lives, Knowledge, and Landscapes

January 15, 2024

A two-year series of workshops on the effects of climate change across the globe

Land erosion, rising sea levels, and receding coastlines related to glacial melt, or increasing strain on urban water systems communities across the world experience the devastation of climate change in different ways. And yet, perhaps there are commonalities between these communities, their challenges, and their responses to them—that can help us find solutions. Finding common ground in these areas was one of the aims of the [Religion and Climate Change in Cross-Regional Perspective](#) project of the Center for Latin American and Latino Studies (CLALS) at American University. Five workshops in relevant global locations were conducted in 2016 and 2018 related to this project.

Washington, DC (March 31-April 1, 2016)

The first workshop was a planning session held in Washington, DC. The purpose was to develop an understanding of different religious responses to environmental crises in regional and international contexts. The participants discussed how different religious

institutions and organizations have responded to climate change in the public arena; how religious traditions have offered different perspectives on the relationship between humans and the natural world; how the advent of climate change has compelled religious traditions to undergo internal processes of self-reevaluation; and how to apply knowledge on religion and climate change to region-specific cases.

[religion-climate-change-dc-planning-meeting-agendaDownload](#)

Workshop in St. Augustine, Trinidad (October 2-3, 2016)

Among other issues, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have faced growing food insecurity and damage related to coastal erosion, deforestation, and extreme weather conditions. Small island developing states (SIDS) in general are confronted with increasing numbers and intensity of tropical storms, hurricanes, flooding, dust storms, and volcanic activity.

How is Climate Change Affecting Islands and What Can We Do About It?

Island communities around the world face many of the same challenges as a result of climate change, including sea level rise and coastal erosion, more frequent and intense tropical storms, flooding, water scarcity, displacement and migration. Island nations have also become critical laboratories for innovative responses to climate challenges. Drawing on their expertise in climate adaptation or resilience in either the South Pacific or Caribbean, panelists will address shared policy goals while exchanging knowledge across distinct geographic and social contexts, giving particular attention to the role of civil society as a catalyst for community responses to climate change and, where possible, to consider the role of religious actors and organizations in these responses and for the development of climate policy in island nations.

**Institute of International Relations, Lecture Room 1
The University of the West Indies-St. Augustine**

Tuesday, October 3rd

4:00 pm – 6:00 pm

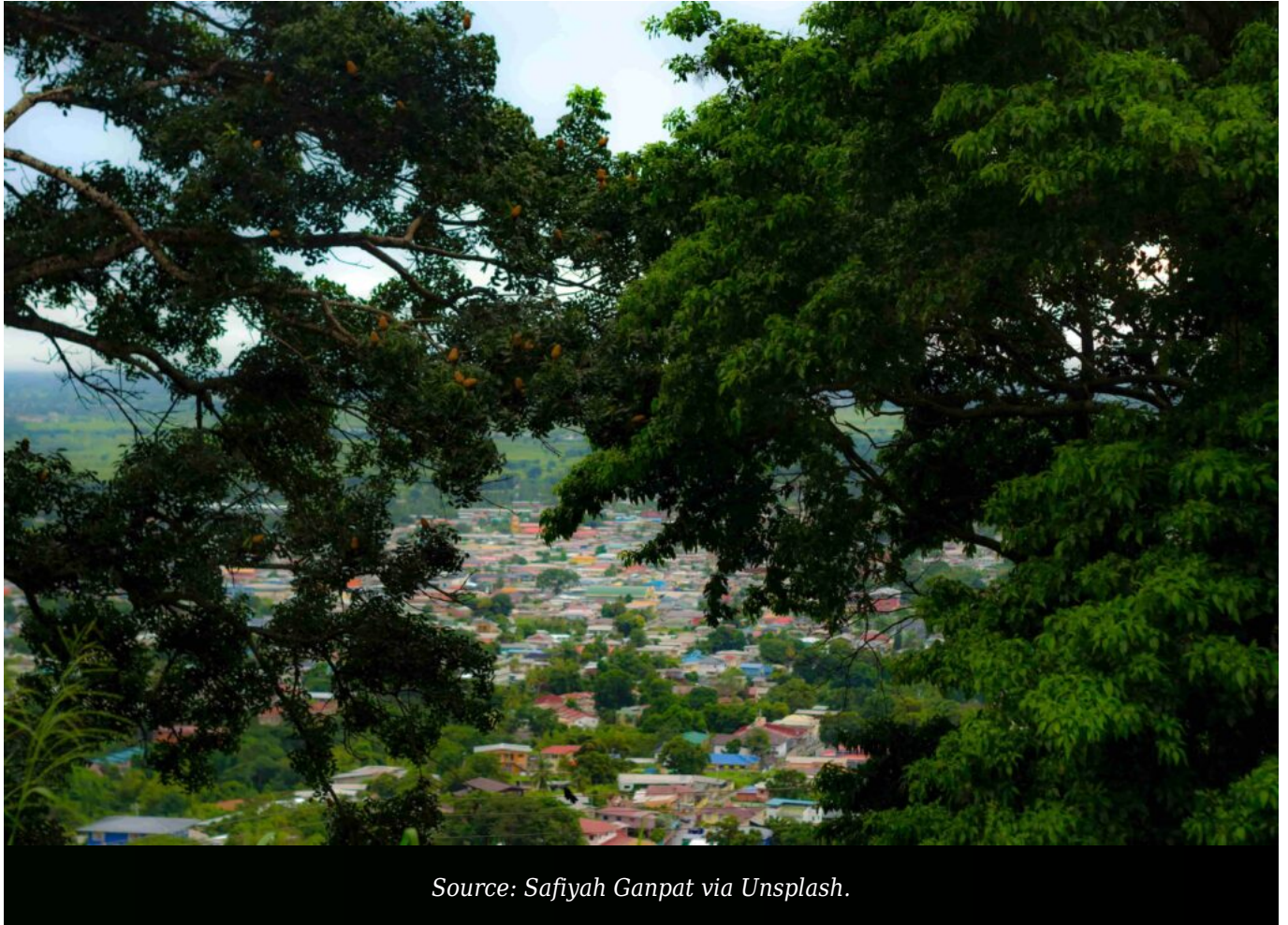
Light refreshments

**Livestream available:
<http://original/livestream.com/iirtv>**

**For further information contact:
Ekana McAlister
(iirt@sta.uwi.edu, 868-662-2002 ext 82084)**



Flier of the workshop in Trinidad. Source: CLALS at American University.



The workshop “Small Island Vulnerabilities in the Pacific and Caribbean” included a panel discussion on the role of religious actors in coordinating responses to climate change in small island developing states; a panel discussion on how religious beliefs and cosmological ideas influence communities’ adaptations to climate change; and a panel on conflicting and overlapping ways that religion and science respond to climate change. The three-part workshop was followed by a public forum titled “How Is Climate Change Affecting Islands, and What Can We Do About It?” Find the full description of these events and its participants below.

[workshop-information-packet_trinidad_final-1Download](#)

Delhi, India (December 8-9 2016)

The workshop on “Civil Society’s Role in Combatting Climate Change” in New Delhi, India was also divided into three parts. The sessions explored the role of religious and cultural beliefs in climate change debates; the role of religion and culture in shaping the public discourse around climate change; and the ways that climate change compels religious and cultural beliefs to change. The three-part workshop was followed by the public forum “Civil Society’s Role in the Response to Climate Change: Perspectives from India and the United States.”

U.S. Embassy in collaboration with
Observer Research Foundation and
American University
invite you to a panel discussion



Civil Society's role in Combatting Climate Change

Friday, **December 9, 2016** at **3:00 PM.**

Panelists:

J M Mauskar, Advisor, ORF

Dr Prodipto Ghosh, Distinguished
Fellow, Earth Science and Climate
Change, TERI

Evan Berry, Associate Professor,
American University

Douglas A. Morris, Deputy Minister
Counselor, U.S. Embassy, New Delhi

Ken Conca, Professor, School of
International Service, American
University

RSVP: Click link

Tel: 23472111/5/6

Email: libdel@state.gov

Venue: **The American Center**
24, Kasturba Gandhi Marg
New Delhi 110001

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Delhi Workshop flier. Source: CLALS at American University.



Source: Bhavitya Indora via Pexels.

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Lima, Peru (May 2-3, 2017)

The workshop in Lima, “Mountains and Implications of Glacial Melt in the Himalayas and Andes” was hosted by the Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya. As the home of a portion of the Amazon rainforest (facing massive industrial deforestation) and a section of the Andes Mountains (facing glacial melt) Peru is experiencing multiple consequences of climate change. Himalayan societies in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, and Tibet are also affected by glacial melt.



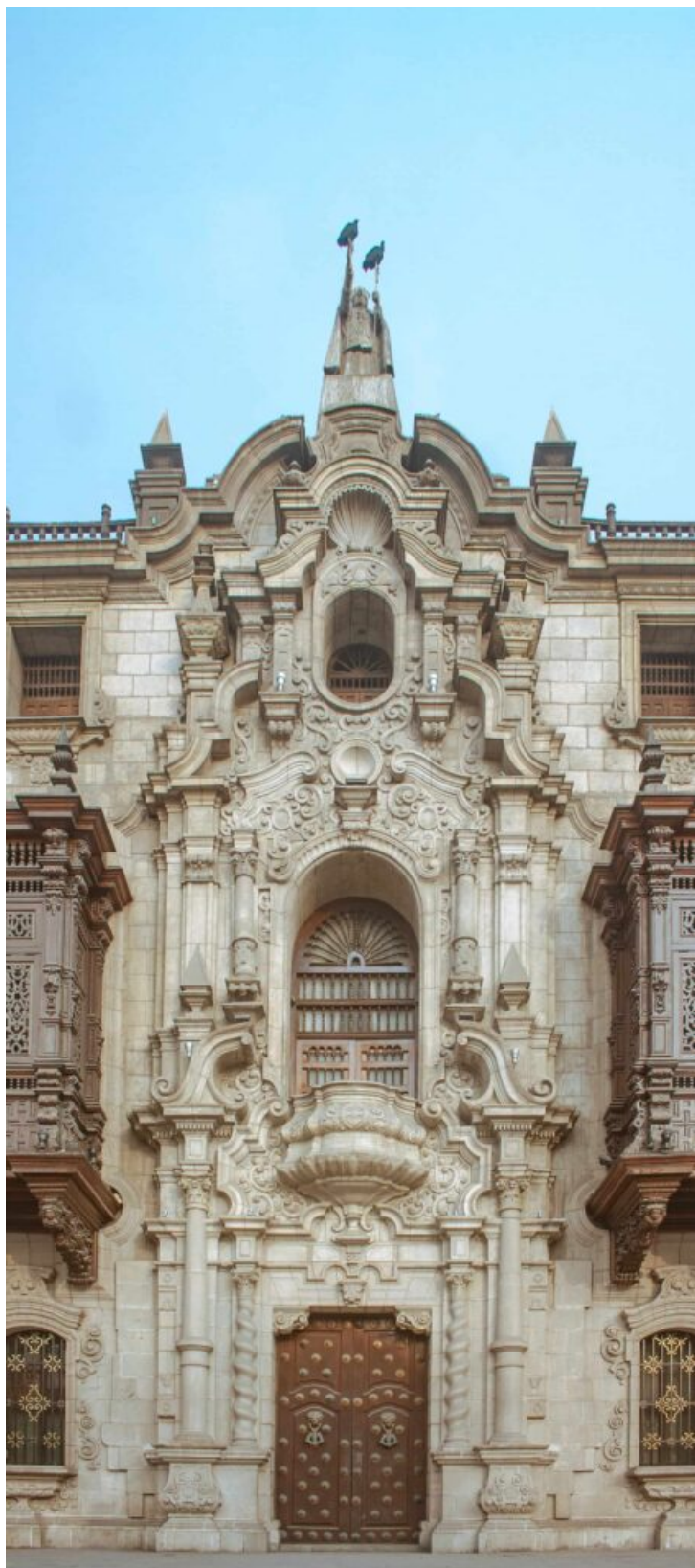
Lima workshop flier. Source: CLALS, American University.



Source: Angel Avalladares via Unsplash.



Source: Cristian Loayza via Pexels.



Source: Cristian Loayza via Pexels.

The first session focused on how glacial melt in the Andes and Himalayas affects sacred pilgrimages. In the Himalayas, the Char Dham is a set of four pilgrimage sites, two of which are shrines to the principal deities of Hinduism: the Badrinath, a shrine to Vishnu and the Kedarnath, a shrine to Shiva. The other two sites are the sources of two sacred rivers: the Gangotri, the source of the Ganga River and the Yamunotri, the source of the Yamuna River. *Qoyllur Rit'i* is a massive pilgrimage and festival undertaken by the Indigenous Quechuan and Aymara peoples of the Andes. The pilgrimage has its roots in the religious festivals of the Incas and celebrates the *Apus*, or mountain spirits who watch over Andean peoples. After the Spanish conquered the Incan Empire, the Catholic Church imposed its own restrictions, imagery, practices, and traditions onto the festival. According to scholar Carolyn Dean, the Catholic Church imposed its own rituals to disrupt and displace the preexisting Indigenous rituals. While Christian imagery and practices have made their way into the festival, the Catholic Church ultimately failed to displace homegrown beliefs that live on to this day.

One of the most important rituals of *Qoyllur Rit'i* involves the interaction between the people and the sacred landscape. Traditionally, the pilgrims would venture to the glaciers and bring back chunks of ice or water, representing the connection between the people and the ecosystem. In recent years, the Peruvian government has forbidden this practice because of glacial melt. Aside from restricting the practices of the pilgrims, climate change also represents the fading of the deities. In India, according

to [David L. Haberman](#), the melting of Himalayan glaciers such as the Chorabari glacier threatens the Kedarnath temple with flooding, land erosion, and landslides.



Pilgrims at the Kedarnath. Source: Shikhar Sharma via Unsplash.



Pilgrims gathered for Qoyllur Rit'i. Source: AgainErick licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

The second-panel discussion included the effects of glacial melt on religious practice in Ladakh, India; Indigenous perceptions of climate change in the rural Bolivian Andes; and local knowledge related to climate change in the Kullu Valley of India. The experts of the third panel discussed anti-dam activism in Sikkim, India; the sacred landscapes of Ecuador's Imbakucha watershed; and climate change and sacred landscapes in Tibet. The final event of this workshop was a public forum on Latin America's contributions to climate change diplomacy.

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Capstone Workshop (May 11, 2018)

The capstone workshop of the Religion and Climate Change and Cross-Regional

Perspective project reassembled experts from the previous workshops to discuss the project's key findings. This workshop also played a key role in producing the two major scholarly outputs of the project: *Understanding Climate Change Through Religious Lifeworlds*, edited by David Haberman and [Climate Change and the Power of Religion](#) by Evan Berry. The workshop was held at American University.

[luce-3-capstone-workshop-agendaDownload](#)

Religion's Role in Response to Climate-Induced Displacement and Migration in Latin America (June 1, 2018)

In many ways, the closing workshop of the Cross-Regional Perspective project served as a prologue to the final project of the Center for Latin American and Latino Studies funded by the Henry R. Luce Initiative on Religion and International Affairs: [Religion and Environmentally-Induced Displacement](#). Many of the same questions, frameworks, and scholars used in the "Cross-Regional Perspective" series were applied to the specific issue of environmental migration, thereby setting the stage for the Climate-Induced Displacement and Migration series.

[luce-3-climate-displacement-workshop-agendaDownload](#)