

Shinto long-term plan

Introduction

This indigenous Japanese faith has approximately 90 million members with 81,000 Shinto shrines throughout the country. These shrines are built largely of wood and form the heart of the villages and local communities of Japan. Often the only extensive areas where trees and greenery flourish in Japanese cities and towns are around holy shrines.

Shintos see themselves as protected by creation. It is the forests and not the buildings that mark the true shrines of Shintoism. The deities are invited to these forests, where they and their environment are protected by the local community, which in turn is protected by the deities. The Shinto plan reflects this theology.

The Shinto plan focuses on forestry and comes out of a commitment to pioneer the drawing up of a new Religious Forestry Standard for religious owned and managed forests by 2013. The plan is for Religious Forests to be managed in ways which are religiously compatible, environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable:

Religiously compatible - based on the faith values, beliefs, heritage and traditions.

Environmentally appropriate - ensures that the harvest of timber and non-timber products, as well as care of sacred areas, maintains the forest's biodiversity, productivity and ecological processes. Also, that those who manage the forest pay attention to environmental concerns, including recycling and non-use of pollutants.

Socially beneficial - helps both local people and society at large to enjoy long-term benefits and also provides strong incentives to local people to sustain the forest resources and adhere to long-term management plans.

Economically viable - means that forest operations are structured and managed so as to be sufficiently profitable, without generating financial profit at the expense of the forest resources, the ecosystem or affected communities. The tension between the need to generate adequate financial returns and the principles of responsible forest operations can be reduced through efforts to market forest products for their best value.

A meeting held in Visby, Gotland in Sweden, in August 2007 and attended by leading representatives of eight different faith traditions with major forestry assets and by leading forestry specialists from the United Nations, World Bank, WWF, Conservation International and various other secular agencies such as FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) agreed on the need to create Religious Forestry Standards (RFS). A key task set for each forest-owning faith was to draw up their own theology of land and forestry.

Timetable of action to achieve this between 2010 and 2014

- a. Between Windsor in November 2009 and Ise in May 2014 when the programme ends, a series of RFSs will be developed which are rooted

in the specific theologies of each major tradition but which agree on certain key environmental, social and economic frameworks for the protection of forests, of whatever kind, over which faiths have some degree of control.

To reach that goal, an Executive Group will meet every six months over the next four and a half years to ensure that this target is met and to manage the overall programme.

- b. The first meeting of the Executive Group will be at Windsor in November 2009. The next meeting will be in Japan in the spring of 2010. In the autumn of 2010, there will be a meeting of theologians who have developed the Theologies of Land and Forests. This will be held in China at the sacred mountain of Hua Shan, near Xian. From this meeting, the core theological framework of each RFS will be agreed and finalised.
- c. In spring 2011, an Asian RFS meeting will be held in Cambodia, hosted by the Association of Buddhists for the Environment in Cambodia, with involvement from Jinja Honcho, International Buddhists groups and Cambodian Buddhists. In spring 2012, a meeting of African RFSs will be held, to be followed by a meeting of the European and North American RFS in autumn 2012.

In 2014, the Executive Group will meet in Japan for the Ise Event where an agreed International Religious Forestry Standard will be launched at the most sacred event in Japanese religious and social life: the rebuilding of the Grand Shrines at Ise. The Jinja Honcho will host all the major forest owning religions at the grand ceremony for the rebuilding of the Great Shrines of Ise.

The Ise Grand Shrines are unique because, in addition to some 5,500 hectares of sacred forest, they are also surrounded by a vast area of forest covering the nearby mountains. These were created to meet the needs of the shrines for timber – with most shrines being replaced every 20-25 years – and a farm to provide food to feed staff and provide offerings to the *kami*.

Together, they comprise a total ecosystem, linking the forests with the river-system, all the way to the sea. It therefore represents the most explicit and advanced example of the Shinto approach to Nature in general, and forest management in particular.