

**Report on LWCCN MENA Region Conference**  
**Ajloun, Jordan**  
**28<sup>th</sup> September – 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2022**  
Revd Dr Dave Bookless, Lausanne Catalyst for Creation Care

**BACKGROUND**

This was the 12<sup>th</sup> and final regional conference for the [LWCCN](#) (Lausanne / World Evangelical Alliance Creation Care Network) global programme. Its origins lie in the 2010 Cape Town ‘Lausanne 3’ Conference which produced the [Cape Town Commitment](#) affirming that ‘creation care is a gospel issue within the Lordship of Jesus Christ’ ([CTCI-7-A](#)). Following Cape Town the Lausanne Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel was held in Jamaica in late 2012 with about 60 Christian leaders from around the world. This led to three things:

- [The Jamaica Call to Action](#)
- A multi-author, multi-disciplinary book, [Creation Care and the Gospel: Reconsidering the Mission of the Church](#)
- The [LWCCN global programme](#) of regional conferences, in South-East Asia (2014), East & Central Africa, North America, Latin America & the Caribbean, West & Francophone Africa (all 2015), South Asia (2016), East Asia, Western Europe (both 2017), Southern Africa, Oceania & Australasia (both 2018), Eastern Europe and, finally, Middle East & North Africa (both 2022).

The conferences have all been organised by one or both of Ed Brown and Dave Bookless, Lausanne Catalysts for Creation Care, working with teams within the respective regions, often including members of [A Rocha](#) national organisations. Each has followed a pattern set at the Jamaica consultation, examining creation care under three broad themes, although the structure and timetabling of each conference has greatly reflected cultural and geographical diversity:

- **God’s Word:** good theology on the Bible and the environment, including missiology, eschatology and ecclesiology.
- **God’s World:** good science examining pressing ecological issues through a regional lens, including climate change, biodiversity loss, waste & over-consumption, water & food, farming, deforestation, desertification.
- **God’s Work:** good practice, learning from existing experience and expertise on the ground in each region, with church-based, NGO and secular-led examples to inspire and inform.

The planning for the MENA regional conference, led by Dave Bookless working with a team in the region from Lausanne, WEA, Anglican Alliance and other mission agencies, began in early 2018 and plans were well-advanced for a conference at [Anafora](#) in Egypt in May 2020 when the pandemic intervened. Thankfully no financial outlay had been made. We recommenced planning in late 2021, initially hoping to tie in to COP27 in Nov. 2022 in Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt. However, costs quickly became prohibitive, with the Egyptian Government imposing minimum pricing for hotel rooms @5x the usual rate. Jordan was eventually decided upon due to costs and visa-free / visa-on-arrival access for all countries in the region, including Palestine. [ABCC](#) (Ajloun Baptist Conference Center) was selected as a venue on several people’s recommendation. Tearfund generously provided a \$5,000 grant to cover the booking deposit. Although the MENA region’s conference was the last in the series and delayed by 2½ years due to the pandemic there was the joy of completion, and a special sense of bringing creation care ‘home’ to the lands of the Bible. To mark this, the conference was attended and addressed not only by Dave Bookless and Ed Brown, who together led the LWCCN programme, but also by Las Newman, Lausanne’s Global Associate Director for Regions, who had hosted our original gathering in Jamaica.

## LOGISTICS & PLANNING

The complexities in organising an international conference in the region were numerous, including time-zones in planning, language (the need for both Arabic and English), busy diaries amongst both the planning group and potential speakers, and finance and funding. The latter was perhaps the biggest headache, with LWCCN operating as a network without a registered organisation in Jordan. We received great help from Joel Kelling personally, and through him the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, rather than accepting advance booking payments, it proved necessary to work with cash on arrival, giving headaches with cashflow and budgeting – particularly without any certainty that those registered would turn up. In addition, the costs of flights within the region meant that we anticipated needing to give bursaries to a significant number of attendees who could not access organisational funding. As a result, a carefully differentiated pricing system was worked out, whereby those from outside the MENA region, with institutional funding, or requesting single rooms effectively subsidised others. There was financial nervousness right until the end of the conference with major invoices for transport, accommodation and translation all involving some last-minute uncertainty. However, in the end, and particularly due to a generous grant from ACT Alliance towards professional translation costs, the conference more than covered its costs, and this modest profit will be carried forward for LWCCN work in creation care within the region and beyond.

### **THE CONFERENCE: 28<sup>th</sup> September-2<sup>nd</sup> October 2022** **‘Creation Care and the Gospel, Ajloun Baptist Conference Center, Jordan**

#### **DESIRED OUTCOMES:**

1. To bring together Christian leaders from evangelical and other churches, seminaries, organisations and society across the MENA region in an atmosphere of prayer and worship, in order to examine a contextualised biblical theology of creation care (God’s word), to hear about global ecological challenges as they affect the MENA region (God’s world), and to share good practice in terms of practical responses to environmental challenges (God’s work).
2. To develop detailed, achievable and focussed action-plans at national and sub-regional levels, in terms of influencing Christian thinking and action, and also in partnering with wider social movements towards environmental sustainability.
3. To create a continuing regional network of Christians engaged with creation care to foster mutual encouragement, share good practice and resources, and seek future opportunities for effective collaboration.
4. To encourage participation in the growing global creation care movement, through LWCCN’s [Pollinator](#) e-newsletter and other online and in-person opportunities.



*Ajloun Baptist Conference Center*



*Ajloun from the Conference Center*

## CONFERENCE OUTLINE & DESCRIPTION:

28<sup>th</sup> September: Arrivals and Conference launch

- Arrivals, room allocations and opening dinner.
- Opening plenary address: Rev. Ed Brown from USA set the tone with a global overview of evangelical involvement in creation care from John Stott and Peter Harris, through to the Lausanne Cape Town Commitment and the LWCCN movement.

29<sup>th</sup> September: first full day

- Dr. Jack Sara, regional head of the WEA and Principal of Bethlehem Bible College opened with a biblical devotion from the Psalms affirming the centrality of creation care.
- Revd. Dr. Dave Bookless gave a biblical overview of *The Mission of God – from Creation to New Creation* which was very well received.
- Dr. Salim Munayer, former Dean of Bethlehem Bible College, spoke as perhaps only a Palestinian Christian can on *Creation and Land in God's Purposes*.
- Afternoon workshops: choice from 3:
  - Creation care advocacy: led by Joel Kelling, based on [Renew Our World](#)'s work.
  - Environmental Assessments in Project Planning: led by Laura Lovering in Peru (pre-recorded but joining via Zoom for discussion) with Sarah Jennings from the Lebanese Society for Educational & Social Development (LSESD)
  - Greening the local Church: led by Dave Bookless, largely based on the experience of [Eco Church](#) and its offshoots.
- Dr. Magda Iskander, a remarkable Egyptian social entrepreneur and medical Doctor led a plenary session. Shee now runs [Health & Hope Oasis](#) in Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, an integrated project providing nutritional, physical and emotional well-being for children with cancer and their families in an environmentally sustainable context. Her passion and personal testimony were deeply moving and inspirational.
- After dinner: Theology Q&A Sessions with Dr Jack Sara, Dr Salim Munayer, Sister Ilaria from the Coptic Anafora centre in Egypt, and Revd. Dr. Dave Bookless.



Jack Sara



Salim Munayer



Sister Ilaria



Sarah Jennings & Michael Eldaba



Tony Rinaudo

30<sup>th</sup> September: 2<sup>nd</sup> full day

- Devotional from Revd Stephen Saied, pastor of a large church in Egypt.
- Address on 'Climate Change & Environmental Issues in the MENA region' from Fadi Sharaiha, former Director of the Jordanian Royal Marine Conservation Society and now based in Canada working with the MENA Leadership Center. This was well-informed and wide-ranging with lots of evidence of how the MENA region is severely impacted by environmental changes.
- Plenary address from agronomist Tony Rinaudo, whose work in Niger pioneered FMNR: Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration, a hugely successful method of reforesting dryland habitats using the stumps and root-systems of existing trees and shrubs. Tony is now globally-recognised as a winner of the 'alternative Nobel prize' Right Livelihood Award, his book 'The Forest Underground' has just won Christian book of the year in Australia and is currently being launched globally, and

a documentary profile film 'The Forest Maker' from Oscar winner Volker Schlöndorff has just come out too. Tony's talk was compelling and riveting, with huge potential relevance for the MENA region.

- Afternoon Workshops: choice from 3:
  - 'Writing the Gospel in the Landscape: the work of A Rocha Lebanon' from Damien Boustany-Kasper, co-National Director of A Rocha Lebanon.
  - 'Mission Akhdar: Greening the Kingdom' from Esther & Martin Kurani, about a permaculture project in Jordan.
  - 'Releasing the Underground Forest, a chance to ask questions of Tony & Liz Rinaudo.
- Evening Film: premier of 'The Forest Maker', a moving and beautiful film about Tony Rinaudo revisiting Niger to see the ongoing impact of his work on communities and the landscape.

1<sup>st</sup> October: practical work and field visits.

- Devotional led by Seham Makram, part of the planning group from CEOSS in Egypt. She combined leading us in some sung Arabic worship with a solid reflection on creation care.
- Plenary workshop, led by Michael Eldaba (Lausanne MENA Regional Director) and Sarah Jennings from LSESD looking at 'How to build a movement'. This drew from business and marketing yet was practical and helpful as national groups began to think about strategies.
- National and Sub-regional Planning: Following this, delegates split into national groups (wider groups for those with only 1-2 from a country) to plan and then present their strategies. This was a lively and vigorous session, with some clear timelines and deliverables from all the groups.



*Presentations of action plans from Egypt, Palestine and Lebanon*

We then boarded a coach for the trip down a 950m winding descent to the Jordan valley and the site of Jesus' baptism. This is in a military-controlled area and we were ever-conscious of Jordanian and Israeli flags and soldiers only a few metres apart. Groups have to be guided and our guide was knowledgeable about both biblical and subsequent history, frequently reminding us that 'Bethany across the Jordan' means Jesus was baptised on the Jordanian bank! We visited several archaeological sites and churches, and were able to dip our hands and feet into the Jordan if wished, which provided welcome relief in temperatures well over 40°C. We also had a talk from Joel Kelling, briefed by Eco-Peace, about the ecological issues facing the Jordan river today, with extraction upstream for agriculture by Israel, Jordan and Palestine meaning the flow is less than 10% of its historical average. This is both a human and ecological crisis, but also provides an opportunity for Jews, Muslims and Christians to work together to address the common challenge. We re-boarded the coach to travel up to Mount Nebo, from where Moses saw the Promised Land before his death. It is a rich archaeological site with amazing views towards the Dead Sea, Jerusalem, Hebron and Bethlehem, and a peaceful

Franciscan church at the heart of it. After a long, hot and tiring but very special day we travelled back to an evening meal and an early night.



*Bethany across the Jordan*



*'Down by the river side ...'*

2<sup>nd</sup> October: Closing day and departures.

Some delegates had left before the visits to the Jordan River and Mt Nebo as cheaper registration without these options had been offered on request. We had a closing time of worship, prayers of sharing and thanksgiving, and a final debrief and commissioning from Las Newman, representing the global Christian creation care movement. After a group photograph, we boarded coaches to visit Ajloun Castle, an impressive and well-restored 12<sup>th</sup> century Ayyubid defence against the western Crusaders. After a further brief stop at a mall in Amman the coach eventually heading to the airport.



*Conference delegates (omitting some who left early or had security concerns)*

#### **ASSESSMENT & OUTCOMES:**

- The first two **desired outcomes** (see above) to bring together Christian leaders across the region and to develop national / sub-regional strategies on creation care, were clearly achieved. The other two outcomes: continuing regional networks and participation in the global creation care movement, can only be assessed in years to come, but follow-up processes through email and Zoom calls have been planned.
- **Gathering senior regional leaders:** we had the leaders of both Lausanne and WEA in the MENA region present throughout and staff or board members from a number of regional theological institutions, and most of the major Christian mission agencies in the region. Due to the

forethought of Dr Jack Sara, the conference was time to follow on from the regional WEA conference, and several key national leaders stayed for at least the first day or two.

- **Gathering 80+ delegates from most countries in the region:** The largest groups (c.20 each) were from Egypt and Jordan, with sizeable groups (5-10) from Lebanon and Palestine, and 1-3 from Algeria, Cyprus, Iraq, Israel, Syria, Tunisia. There were also visitors from outside the region, mainly attending as speakers, from Australia, Jamaica, Romania, UK and USA. This was undoubtedly the largest and most representative gathering on creation care ever held in the MENA region.
- **Positive Feedback on content:** there was no formal feedback process, but informal responses via email, WhatsApp and conversations with numerous delegates revealed how the conference has significantly changing attitudes, theological understanding, and practical priorities. The conference concluded with an overwhelming sense of conviction and determination to see creation care become mainstream in churches and Christian organisations across the region, with multiple individual, organisational and national commitments. Monitoring the national action plans over the coming months and years will further inform an assessment of the effectiveness of the conference.
- **Media opportunities:** several staff from SAT-7, which broadcasts across the region, were present throughout as was the regional reporter for Christianity Today, who interviewed Ed and I at length. There is a profile of Ed at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/october-web-only/creation-care-lausanne-global-environment-tour-ed-brown.html>. SAT-7 plan to use some of the conference contacts and material for future TV and radio programmes.
- **Invitations to influence theological education in the region:** participants included Maronite Priest Fr. Mikhael Kanbar, Executive Secretary of ATIME, the Association of Theological Institutions of the Middle East. He approached Dave Bookless to join the planning group and be a plenary speaker for a major conference in Beirut in May 2023, involving all Christian theological institutions in the region, from Orthodox and Catholic to mainstream Protestant and Evangelical. This is being pursued actively, and a senior Catholic theologian has now been recruited to speak as well. There were also discussions with a Board member of JETS, the Jordan Evangelical School of Theology, regarding leading a whole-college course on creation care.
- **Planning the next stage of LWCCN's global strategy.** With Ed Brown, Dave Bookless and Las Newman present, alongside major leaders from the MENA region, informal discussions were held about the next stage of LWCCN's work beyond campaign of regional conferences. Key opportunities include developing a programme of webinars, organised both thematically and regionally, to inform, resource, network and inspire. Plans were also discussed to influence the global Lausanne 4 conference, to be held in South Korea in 2024, to ensure that the climate and biodiversity crisis is included in the regional meetings in 2023 that are planning towards this.

**THANK YOU!** This conference was only possible through the hard work and generosity of numerous individuals and organisations. Over nearly 4 years of planning it is impossible to name everybody, but those who were involved throughout or worked hard to plan, fundraise, organise logistics, recruit attendees and publicise the conference include: Joel Kelling, Michael El Daba, Seham Makram, Jack Sara, Jennie Evans, Jeppe Schmidt, Sarah Jennings, Dave Bookless and our speakers including some of the above as well as Ed Brown, Salim Munayer, Laura Lovering, Magda Iskander, Sister Ilaria, Stephen Saied, Fadi Sharaiha, Tony Rinaudo, Liz Rinaudo, Damien Boustany-Kasper, Esther Kurani, Martin Kurani, Las Newman. Particular thanks to Tearfund UK and ACT Alliance for generous grants which enabled the conference to take place and be affordable for delegates.

Revd Dr Dave Bookless  
October 2022