

Kansas Interfaith Power & Light

**Testimony by Kansas Interfaith Power & Light Director Rabbi Moti Rieber
in opposition to HR 6018 – Opposition to UN Agenda 21**

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I'm the Director of Kansas Interfaith Power & Light, a statewide nonprofit organization that engages faith communities in environmental stewardship and sustainable practices through the promotion of energy efficiency, energy conservation, and renewable energy.

I am rising in opposition to HR 6018, resolution opposing UN Agenda 21. I do so not because I support Agenda 21 particularly, but because I believe that the issue is a false one, a strawman designed to limit our state's ability to move more strongly into the sustainable economy, which we need to do for both economic and environmental reasons.

Agenda 21 is a non-binding agreement among 178 countries adapted at the Rio earth summit in 1992. The first paragraph of the preamble reads, and I quote:

1.1. Humanity stands at a defining moment in history. We are confronted with a perpetuation of disparities between and within nations, a worsening of poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy, and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystems on which we depend for our well-being. However, integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to the fulfillment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, more prosperous future. No nation can achieve this on its own; but together we can - in a global partnership for sustainable development.

There's nothing in this paragraph with which I would disagree. What this says is that environmental impacts have to be a consideration as we make development decisions, and that we should develop in a way that limits the damage we do. This is what is meant by "sustainable."

Yet somehow this 20-year-old, I repeat, non-binding agreement has become the object of intense opposition amongst a small percentage of rightwing activists. I am told that whenever a bikepath or a water management issue is on the agenda at a planning committee meeting in our state, these activists come to complain about Agenda 21, claiming that the UN is going to come to take away the keys to our cars or our rights to private property. This is, of course, patent nonsense. Just to be clear: the word "sustainable" does not mean, the decisions are made in Geneva. The decisions in Kansas, or elsewhere in the US, will be made right here in Kansas – it is a false issue, and unworthy of the time this body is putting into it.

But though the organized opposition to Agenda 21 is based on a baseless conspiracy theory, there are in fact real issues, and it's worth reminding the committee of two of them. The first is that human activity is causing a buildup of

carbon in earth's atmosphere that already has and will continue to lead to changes in earth's climate, including glacial melt, sea level rise, limited access to fresh water, agricultural impacts, disease vector shifts, and more. As a person of faith I would assert that covering our ears and denying these demonstrable facts is immoral, as it endangers people around the world who don't have the the resources available to them to deal with the impacts that we are inflicting on them.

And the second fact of which I would remind the committee is that there are actions we can take to mitigate these impacts, including transitioning to cleaner, renewable sources of energy, lowering our reliance on fossil-fuel powered transportation, and in general being better and more responsible stewards of the earth which God has given us. It's a happy fact that these activities are also providing vital jobs and economic activity throughout the state.

Though opposition to Agenda 21 is not much more than black helicopter stuff, as the overheated language of the resolution makes clear, there is a cost. Agenda 21 is being used as a convenient strawman to oppose all kinds of sensible, sustainable planning decisions on the state and local level. In Arizona it was used to force the false science of climate change denial into the schools. It is used to oppose investment in green energy, or for storm water management, or for bike paths, or public transportation, or for any development that will lead to us having a lighter impact on the earth. These matters, so sensible on their own, all of a sudden become sinister when they are linked with the bogeyman of Agenda 21.

In conclusion, the Agenda 21 would have been just another forgotten UN initiative if opposition to it weren't being ginned up by those who have a philosophical or economic opposition to sustainable, renewable development. The opposition is really to taking any actions that would move us away from our profligate use of fossil fuels and toward a more sensible and – yes – sustainable way of life. Since I support the move toward sustainability, and since I don't think Agenda 21 is any kind of real threat, I oppose the resolution before the committee today.