

INTERFAITH RAINFOREST INITIATIVE UPDATES – April and May 2022

BRAZIL

Religious leaders, members of IRI Brazil Advisory Council, sign open letter against approval of bills called “package of environmental destruction”

The religious institutions of IRI Brazil’s Advisory Council sent an open letter to the President of the Supreme Federal Court (STF), Minister Luiz Fux, and to the members of the National Congress, against the set of bills known as the Environmental Destruction Package, especially PL 191/2020, which allows for mining and other exploitation on indigenous lands. The bills will be voted on in the coming weeks. The document was signed by the following organizations: the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB); the National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil (CONIC); the Brazilian Evangelical Christian Alliance (ACEB); Religions for Peace Brazil and the National Union of Islamic Entities of Brazil (UNI). Indigenous organizations APIB and CIMI also endorsed the letter sent to the Supreme Federal Court. Members of the Advisory Council shared the letter with their respective networks.

Religious leaders, members of IRI Brazil Advisory Council, send letter to the Ministers of the Supreme Federal Court asking for socio-environmental actions that seek to combat setbacks

IRI Brazil Advisory Council members and other religious leaders sent a letter to the Supreme Federal Court calling for the court to take into consideration article 225 of the Brazilian Federal Constitution and annulate certain acts of the Executive Branch that criminally threaten the sustainable development of the country, including the increase in forest destruction, the loss of biodiversity, the increase in contaminated water sources and climate change. The actions mentioned in the letter were ADPF 760 (failure to comply with the climate targets stated in the Paris Agreement and the program to combat deforestation in the Amazon), ADPF 735 (withdrawal of Ibama's autonomy in Operation Green Brazil 2), ADPF 651 (exclusion of civil society from the board of the National Environmental Fund), ADO 54 (oversight of actions to combat deforestation), ADO 59 (suspension of the Amazon Fund), ADI 6148 (change in air quality standards defined by the Conama resolution) and ADI 6808 (automatic granting of environmental licensing through “provisional measures” – an automatically applicable law created by the President of Brazil).

IRI Brazil brings together religious leaders to show their solidarity to indigenous peoples during the “Acampamento Terra Livre”, in Brasilia

During the Acampamento Terra Livre in April, indigenous leaders invited religious leaders connected to IRI Brazil to participate in the first face-to-face event organized by the group since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Religious leaders and IRI Brazil shared a message of solidarity called "Our Land is Sacred" and also presented an open letter against the Environmental Destruction Package, reaffirming their position in favor of life and the defense of indigenous lands. Representatives from the National Confederation of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), the National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil (CONIC), the Brazilian Evangelical Christian Alliance (ACEB), Religions for Peace Brazil, the Israelite Confederation of Brazil (CONIB), Santo Daime, Afro-Brazilian religions, and Buddhism were all present at the event.

The event was closed with a symbolic planting of a Brazilian native tree sapling by those present, signifying the union of all for the ecological restoration of the country's land and the defense of the constitutional rights of indigenous peoples, quilombo communities, river inhabitants and other communities that live in the forests and take care of nature and the environment. The event featured in several media outlets and shared on social networks by religious and indigenous leaders and organizations.

IRI Brazil provides training for Amazonian religious leaders on climate change and combating deforestation

On May 24 and 25, IRI Brazil organized a training session for 17 Amazonian religious leaders on climate change and combating tropical forest deforestation at the Monitoring and Early Warning of Natural Disasters Center (CEMADEN) and the National Institute for Space Research (INPE), in the city of São José dos Campos-SP. The group was composed of Catholic and Anglican religious leaders, indigenous and community leaders, and young entrepreneurs. A group of Catholic people from the state of São Paulo also participated in the training. In addition to the knowledge acquired, the training created the opportunity for several members of the group to create partnerships and new initiatives aimed at preventing climate disasters in their communities, supporting indigenous peoples, and combating deforestation.

National Facilitator presents IRI Brazil to 60 Catholic priests from São Paulo

Taking advantage of the visit to the CEMADEN and INPE, the IRI Brazil National Facilitator, Carlos Vicente, met with the Bishop of the São José dos Campos-SP diocese and 60 priests from the region to present IRI Brazil and invite them to participate in the interfaith movement for the preservation of the Amazon and defense of the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

IRI Brazil approves two projects to produce a "Virtual Amazon" film

Instituto Clima e Sociedade – ICS has approved USD 70,000.00 to produce the "Virtual Amazon" film. The film is expected to be ready in September 2022 and will be used to conduct awareness workshops on the preservation of the Amazon and defense of indigenous peoples within religious institutions in the country. Conservation International has also approved USD 10,000.00 to purchase 3-D glasses. The glasses have already been purchased and will be used in workshops as soon as the film is completed.

COLOMBIA

IRI Colombia continues leadership in Escucha la Amazonia

IRI Colombia participated in working meetings of the Escucha la Amazonia alliance, contributing to the preparation of conceptual documents and analysis of the government plan of the candidate Federico Gutiérrez. The purpose of the Escucha la Amazonia alliance is to carry out high-impact advocacy activities with the presidential candidates in order to ensure that the protection of the Amazon and its restoration become a substantial part of their government programs.

IRI Colombia delivers training tools and guides for local chapters

IRI Colombia has prepared didactic aids for training and capacity building workshops with its 36 local chapters. The tools review the basic contents related to the purpose and methodology for the preparation of IRI local action plans and explain the scope and content of the evaluation exercises of these plans. IRI Colombia has also prepared methodological guides for the evaluation of environmental and pastoral action plans. These guides provide guidance on the analysis of the causes that have contributed to the achievement of action objectives, the obstacles that have limited the achievement of objectives, the alternatives to overcome these obstacles and the degree of uptake of pedagogical resources distributed among the coordinators of the 36 IRI local chapters.

Capacity building workshops delivered for several local chapters

Training and capacity building workshops were delivered to IRI Colombia local chapters in San José del Guaviare, El Retorno, Calamar and Miraflores (department of Guaviare) and San Vicente del Caguán, Puerto Rico and Cartagena del Chairá (department of Caquetá). The purpose of the workshops was to evaluate the progress of the environmental and pastoral action plans, analyze the viability of creating citizen oversight bodies for environmental matters and forest policy, and initiate the study of tropical forests and climate change.

IRI Colombia refines its roadmap for advocacy around legislative agenda, Escazú Agreement

IRI Colombia has developed an update on the legislative agenda in the country, examining the development of bills that are of interest to the program because of their relation to the protection of the Amazon. The intention behind updating its legislative agenda is to adjust the IRI Colombia intervention strategy to make the most effective contributions possible to protecting forests and the rights of indigenous peoples. IRI Colombia also updated a follow-up note on the draft law for the adoption of the Escazú Agreement. The note examines the prospects for progress in the approval of the agreement at the end of the legislature and the current presidential term. It also provides inputs on the adjustments to be made as of July 20, when the new Congress begins its activities.

IRI Colombia holds working meetings with political, religious leaders

IRI Colombia held a working meeting with Alexander Bermúdez, representative to the Chamber of Deputies for the department of Guaviare. The representative was reelected for the new legislature that will begin on July 20, 2022. It was agreed that he will support the formation of the Colombia for the Amazon parliamentary alliance and that he will promote a bill to create an environmental chair with a territorial approach. The program also held a working meeting with Monsignor Omar de Jesús Mejía, Archbishop of Florencia (Caquetá) and president in Colombia of the Pan-Amazonian Network – Repam, an inter-church organization that is part of the Advisory Council of IRI Colombia. The purpose of the meeting was to inform about the action plan for 2022 and to concretize common tasks related to the execution of the plan.

IRI Colombia holds webinar, "Spiritualities for the care of the Common Home"

On May 24, IRI Colombia, together with the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network of Colombia REPAM and the Social Pastoral Secretariat of the Episcopal Conference of Colombia, held a

Webinar on "Spiritualities for the care of the Common Home" as part of the week of celebration of the encyclical Laudato Si. Participants included spokespeople from the Catholic Church, evangelical churches and indigenous peoples.

IRI Colombia publishes monthly bulletin, newsletter El Bosque es Vida, and continues outreach through social media

IRI Colombia published and disseminated its monthly bulletin, reporting on its activities and achievements in April. The program also published the latest issue of its newsletter, El Bosque es Vida. The issue includes a scientific article on flying rivers and an informative article on the meeting of IRI Colombia with Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UN Environment Programme. It also contains an interview with Monsignor Nelson Jair Cardona, Bishop of San José del Guaviare, among others. IRI Colombia also disseminated pieces on social media commemorating Earth Day, Arbor Day and International Biodiversity Day, 57 graphic pieces corresponding to the communications campaign of the Escucha la Amazonia alliance, and nine animations of infographics published in El Bosque es Vida.

PERU

IRI Peru follows up the Parliamentary Block for Amazonia

IRI Peru and the Pact for the Amazon convened a dialogue on "Legislative Priorities for the agenda of sustainable forests in the Amazon" as a follow up to the creation of a Parliamentary Block for Amazonia. The dialogue brought together experts on the subject and national, regional and congressional authorities to present strong ideas on forest protection to analyze their viability. The dialogue also built bridges between government authorities and interest groups for the common goal of defining forest management strategies in the country.

IRI Peru holds the first training workshop of 2022 "United for the Amazon: We are Forests".

On April 21, IRI Peru held the workshop "United for the Amazon: We are Forests 2022" as part of its training process for its twelve local chapters. The workshop put into practice materials prepared by IRI such as the board game "Forests save the planet". The workshop focused on the theme of the Amazon's ecosystem services and the sacredness of nature and was supported by educational videos with speakers such as José Álvarez and Javier Melloni.

IRI Peru holds dialogue on the elections with the President of the National Jury of Elections and progress on a cooperation agreement

IRI Peru held a dialogue with the President of the National Jury of Elections (JNE) to carry out informed discussions within the framework of the Regional and Municipal Electoral Process that is underway for October of this year. The proposal to put the urgency of protecting the forests on the agenda of the candidates for regional and municipal governments was welcomed by the electoral authority and discussions began on the signing of a cooperation agreement. The conversations took place in the middle of the dialogue held by the president of the JNE with the Interreligious Council of Peru.

IRI Peru national coordination meeting with local chapter leaders

IRI Peru convened its first national coordination meeting of its local chapters to strengthen the action plans and intervention strategies for the year. The meeting focused on local chapter work plans, situation analysis in each region, dialogues on how to strengthen cooperation with other actors in the localities, and identifying the priority issues to be addressed in the electoral process underway in each region. With this meeting, a national IRI Peru network was formally established with the intention of making a more visible presence in the Amazon and in the country, and to strengthen their actions on the protection of the forests and the peoples that inhabit them. It was agreed that the network would meet every three months to calibrate strategies and work planning.

IRI Peru plans dialogue on legislative priorities for sustainable forests

IRI Peru held coordination meetings with the office of Congresswoman Ruth Luque and the Peruvian Society of Environmental Law to plan for a dialogue on legislative priorities for the defense of forests and forest defenders. The intervention was based on the strategic document developed by IRI Peru systematizing forest legislation priorities, which was presented to the congressmen at the installation session of the Parliamentary Group for the Amazon. The dialogue, which will be held in June and will be co-organized by IRI Peru and the SPDA, is expected to have the main authorities and experts in the field present with the aim of promoting a legislative and regulatory agenda for sustainable forests.

IRI Peru participates in the cycle of talks "Common House: Ecological Conversion and defense of the Amazon"

As part of the training school organized by Fridays for the Future and Alsakuy, IRI Peru was invited to participate in a discussion on Good Living and the Common House. The objective of the meeting was to deepen the need to move to an ecological conversion and to live in brotherhood with nature. The role of IRI Peru in the mobilization of faith communities for the defense of forests was offered as an important example of this principle in action.

IRI Peru holds training events with Lay Associates of Religious Congregations and at the Conference of Religious of Peru CONFER

On Saturday, April 23, Laura Vargas, National Facilitator of IRI Peru, participated in the 1st Meeting of Lay Associates of Religious Congregations, "Together to assume the defense of our common home". In this panel event, the Laura Vargas presented the reality of the Amazon forests and the urgent need to stop deforestation. Father Roberto Carrasco OMI, coordinator of IRI Aucayacu, also participated in the panel. Together with CONFER Peru, IRI Peru also participated in a course on Laudato Sí to generate greater citizen awareness for the care and protection of forests and the people who live in them. On the first day, which was attended by Cardinal Pedro Barreto, Laura Vargas, gave a presentation on care of the Common Home, and the importance of forests for the life and health of the planet. The event was attended by more than 130 religious leaders from different parts of the country and also pastoral agents interested in the subject from other Latin American countries (Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, Colombia, Panama, Mexico, Santo Domingo).

IRI Peru meets with Director General of the Human Rights Directorate of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights to assess the situation of vulnerability of forest defenders

IRI Peru held a meeting with Edgardo Rodriguez, Director General of Human Rights of MINJUSDH about growing threats to forest defenders in the country. During the pandemic, 17 indigenous leaders were killed and the vulnerability of forest defenders is increasing. Faced with this situation, IRI Peru informed that they are joining efforts with concerned congressmen, such as Ruth Luque, and multisectoral roundtables are being developed in Ucayali and Madre de Dios. IRI Peru agreed to participate in working groups being formed to put the situation of forest defenders on the agenda of regional and local authorities, especially in the upcoming electoral process.

IRI Peru participates in the Pre Pan-Amazon Social Forum, "Articulated and in struggle: Citizen Networks and Defense of the Amazon"

IRI Peru was invited to participate in a session of the FOSPA Pre-Forum to present the IRI Peru network of local chapters in the Amazon. The session was part of a dialogue with specialists and representatives of civil society to publicize the work that IRI Peru has been doing in the mobilization of faith communities, indigenous organizations and civil society for the defense of the Amazon and its defenders. IRI Peru shared the work experience of the local chapters with representatives of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty - GCAP coalition, the Working Group with Indigenous Peoples of the National Coordinator of Human Rights of Peru and the National Network for the Protection of Rivers of Peru Rios Limpios y Libres (Clean and Free Rivers).

IRI Peru creates partnership with the Foundation for Conservation and Development on electoral dialogues

IRI Peru held meetings with the Foundation for Conservation and Development, which has extensive experience in Amazonian electoral dialogues in Colombia and is also based in Peru. The meetings focused on creating synergies to carry out electoral dialogues aimed at both informing voters and candidates about forest protection. IRI Peru met with Mariano Castro (ex-Vice Minister of the Environment) and Andrea Buitrago (Peruvian representative of the Foundation) to concretize this alliance and jointly organize the dialogues, relying on IRI Peru institutional agreements with MINAM and one that is under development with the National Jury of Elections.

IRI Peru engages in civil act of support to recognize defenders of the Amazon

Together with the Laudato Si movement and a broad group of institutions, IRI Peru called for a civic act on May 29th in a public square in the district of Miraflores in support and recognition of the lives of murdered forest defenders. The event was a public call and appeal urging authorities to end the impunity for those threatening forest defenders and forest communities, and a call to respect the ancestral territories of indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples represented by AIDSESEP participated, and a delegation of indigenous people living in Lima was present. The public mobilization was accompanied by a letter sent to the legislative and executive authorities asking them to make every effort to protect the lives of forest defenders. The mobilization follows on the heels of a "Vigil for Environmental Defenders", organized by the Peruvian chapter of the Laudato Si' Movement and IRI Peru as part of the closing of Laudato Si' Week in April.