UPDATE ON RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS

IRI COUNTRY PROGRAMS

Over the past year, the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI) has been active in Africa, Asia and Latin America, working with the most prominent and established faith-based organizations and religious leaders to launch IRI country programs in Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Indonesia, and Peru. The country programs are led by high-level Advisory Councils that define strategic priority actions on national, state and local levels.

Events associated with the country programs have included:

- Training of approximately one thousand religious leaders on tropical forests, climate change and the rights of indigenous peoples
- The issuing of national declarations of religious solidarity on the protection of rainforests and those that serve as their guardians
- The formation of powerful national coalitions that bring together senior religious leaders, indigenous peoples, relevant NGOs, scientists and the United Nations in national Advisory Councils
- The development of national strategies and action plans for each IRI country program on education and awareness raising, network expansion to regions of the country where forests face the greatest threats, influencing public policies and laws on the protection of forests, and exerting influence on the policies and practices of the private sector.

The IRI country program in Colombia has successfully launched five IRI local chapters in the areas of the country with the highest rates of deforestation and provided training to over 500 religious leaders, many of whom now represent IRI at the local level. The local chapters hosted political debates with mayoral candidates in high-deforestation municipalities, resulting in their explicit commitment to protecting rainforests and embedding IRI representatives on municipal development councils to help shape forest policy in the respective regions. The country program also negotiated a commitment from Congress to end deforestation as part of the country’s National Development Plan, briefed the President on the initiative, developed and placed op-eds on the spiritual responsibility to protect forests, prepared and submitted a position paper calling on the government to include commitments to end deforestation in its next Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the UNFCCC, and much more.

The IRI country program in Peru has launched an IRI local chapter in Puerto Maldonado (with plans for two more), engaged in extensive awareness raising about IRI in religious communities across the country, briefed the President on the initiative, developed and placed op-eds on the moral responsibility to protect forests, hosted political debates on forest protection with candidates for Congress that were featured on national television, prepared and submitted a position paper calling on the government to include commitments to end deforestation in its next Nationally Determined Contributions to the UNFCCC, and much more.

An Executive Council of religious leaders is taking the IRI country program forward in Brazil, holding a successful two day IRI education event in Sao Paulo in December 2019, with the participation of more than 90 faith leaders. Similar events are planned in other Brazilian cities in 2020.
The IRI country program was launched in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) during a 3-day event in December 2019 that included the training of over 200 religious and other leaders from across the country, as well as indigenous and community leaders, the participation of the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, and the establishment of an Advisory Council chaired by the two most influential religious organizations in the country (CENCO and ECC).

In Indonesia, the IRI country program was launched in January 2020 with the participation of over 250 religious and other leaders and included a powerful declaration and commitment by the eight major faiths of Indonesia to work together with indigenous peoples to protect and restore the country’s forests. (link here to UNEP article).

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AND COMMUNICATIONS

- A 3-minute Interfaith Rainforest Initiative video was developed with an introduction by Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP and featuring Jane Goodall, UN Messenger of Peace, including versions with subtitles in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Bahasa. The video has been shared with millions of people around the world.

- IRI country primers on deforestation for religious leaders and faith communities have been published for each of the five program countries, each in English and the national language.
  - Brazil – (English and Portuguese)
  - Colombia – (English and Spanish)
  - Democratic Republic of the Congo – (English and French)
  - Indonesia – (English and Bahasa)
  - Peru – (English and Spanish)

- IRI issue primers have been published on three priority topics in five languages.
  - Tropical Forests: A Resource Under Threat – An Issue Primer for Religious Leaders and Faith Communities (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Bahasa)
  - Tropical Forests and Climate Change – An Issue Primer for Religious Leaders and Faith Communities (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Bahasa)
  - Indigenous Peoples: Guardians of the Forests – An Issue Primer for Religious Leaders and Faith Communities (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Bahasa)

- IRI faith toolkits on forest protection for religious leaders and faith communities have been published in several languages.
  - Catholic Toolkit (English, Portuguese, Spanish and French)
  - Protestant Toolkit (English, Portuguese, Spanish and French)
  - Evangelical Toolkit (English, Portuguese, Spanish and French)
  - Muslim Toolkit (English, Portuguese, Spanish and French)
  - Buddhist Toolkit (English, Portuguese and Spanish)
  - Hindu Toolkit (English, Portuguese and Spanish)
  - Jewish Toolkit (English, Portuguese and Spanish)
  - Baha’i Toolkit (English, Portuguese and Spanish)
The IRI Resource Guide for Religious Leaders and Faith Communities on Rainforest Protection will be launched in the first half of 2020.

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative now has active social media channels on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, as well as more than 150 IRI-branded videos (based on interviews conducted during the Religions for Peace 10th World Assembly) for distribution through social media.

The partnership launched a global campaign and declaration called Faiths for Forests, with a dedicated campaign website (www.faithsforforests.org) where faith-based organizations and places of worship from around the world can endorse the declaration, access the educational materials and share the IRI video on social media.

GLOBAL EVENTS IN 2019.

At the Religions for Peace 10th World Assembly in August 2019, over 900 faith leaders from 125 countries and representing a constituency of more than 1 billion people joined together to affirm their commitment to work through the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative to end tropical deforestation and stand in solidarity with the indigenous peoples that serve as their guardians by endorsing the Faiths for Forests Declaration. The declaration states in the strongest terms that the protection of tropical forests and indigenous peoples’ rights is a moral responsibility, is essential to global efforts to combat climate change and is an issue that demands the mobilizing power, influence and reach of the world’s religious leaders and faith communities. The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative also contributed to one of the four plenary sessions (IRI action point, presented by Bishop Gunnar Stalsett and Sonia Guajajara and statement made by Dr. Charles McNeill), held a workshop, and participated in the closing press conference (Rev. Fletcher Harper statement, Sonia Guajajara statement, and Bishop Gunnar Stalsett statement).

As a contribution to the UN Secretary-General’s Climate Action Summit in September 2019, IRI launched the Faiths for Forests campaign (www.faithsforforests.org), which is a call to action for faith-based organizations, networks and places of worship everywhere to join the IRI movement by endorsing the Faiths for Forests Declaration, accessing and downloading IRI educational materials and inviting others to join by sharing on social media. The campaign was launched at the High-Level Nature-Based Solutions Event by Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director, and then again at the Nature-Climate Hub by Olav Fyske Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches and Sonia Guajajara, APIB (article on launch).

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative featured at various events during the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Madrid (COP 25) in December 2019, including screening of the IRI video and remarks by Laura Vargas (IRI Peru) at the High-Level Forest Event, and several other side events focused on IRI or interfaith action for climate and forests. Blanca Echeverry (IRI Colombia) and Laura Vargas (IRI Peru) each advocated for concrete commitments in their government’s next NDCs to protecting forests and the rights of indigenous peoples.
IRI made a major contribution to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, with the event **Forest Defenders: New Threats and New Responses**, which was held at UN Headquarters in April 2019, hosted by actor and activist Alec Baldwin, attended by over 600 people, covered widely by leading media outlets – New York Times, The Washington Post and others – and featured speakers from the IRI partners and well beyond Full video ([here](#)). The following interventions were made: Alec Baldwin, actor and activist ([here](#)), Benki Piyako, indigenous Asháninka leader, Apiwtxa community ([here](#)), Rev. Fletcher Harper, Executive Director, GreenFaith ([here](#)), Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples ([here](#)), Gregorio Diaz Mirabal, Coordinator, Congress of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA) ([here](#)), Sonia Guajajara, Coordinator, Association of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB) ([here](#)), Andy White, Coordinator, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) ([here](#)), Carole Excell, Director, Environmental Democracy Practice, World Resources Institute (WRI) ([here](#)), Patricia Guajinga, indigenous Kichwa leader, Sarayaku community ([here](#)), Leila Salazar-Lopez, Executive Director, Amazon Watch ([here](#)), Alexander von Bismarck, Executive Director, Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) ([here](#)), Rukka Sombolinggi, Secretary General, Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN) ([here](#)), H.E. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations of Canada ([here](#)), H.E. Mona Juul, Ambassador of Norway to the United Nations ([here](#)).

IRI representatives also participated in May 2019 as featured speakers in both the **Governors’ Climate and Forest Task Force Annual Meeting** (Rt. Rev. Francisco Duque-Gomez and Reverend Edgar Castaño) and the **Tropical Forest Alliance Annual Meeting** (Cardinal Pedro Barreto), where they explored ways for the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative to work more closely with these respective organizations and their partners. The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative was also featured during the **UN Environment Assembly (UNEA)** in March 2019 as part of the “Faith for Earth Pavilion”, as well as in the **International Conference on Religions and the SDGs** at the Vatican, and the **G20 Interfaith Forum** in June 2019, the **Kofi Annan Faith Briefing** in July 2019, among others.