News
EarthBeat



Leydy Pech, a Mayan beekeeper, led a fight against plantations of genetically modified soy that were decimating wild bees in her region of Mexico. (Robin Canul for AIDA)

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Editor's Note: *EarthBeat Weekly is your weekly newsletter about faith and climate change. Below is the March 5 edition. To receive EarthBeat Weekly in your inbox, sign up here.*

With International Women's Day approaching on March 8, it's appropriate to highlight the work of women who defend the right to a clean and safe environment, often at risk to their own lives. There are far too many to count, of course, but here are brief portraits of three recent winners of the Goldman Prize, which is sort of the Nobel Prize for defenders of the environment.

When soy plantations moved into the Mexican states of Campeche and Yucatán, the combination of deforestation and chemicals used on the genetically modified soy was devastating for the wild bees on which local people depend for a livelihood.

Leydy Pech brought Indigenous Mayan farmers and beekeepers like herself together with environmental groups and researchers to study the environmental and health impacts of the plantations and the chemicals they used, including the herbicide glyphosate.

As a result of their efforts, Mexico's Supreme Court ruled in 2015 that Indigenous communities must be consulted before genetically modified crops can be planted nearby, and in 2017, the government revoked Monsanto's permit to grow genetically modified soybeans in seven states, including Campeche and Yucatán. Nevertheless, the rule has not been effectively enforced, as Pech recently told Bobby Bascomb of Living On Earth.

Farther south, in Ecuador, **Nemonte Nenquimo** grew up in an area where the government had opened up the tropical Amazonian forest for oil drilling. She recalls seeing both the environmental impacts and the social effects on her Waorani people.

In 2018, Nenquimo, a Waorani leader, played a key role in a battle against the auction of millions of acres of forest for oil drilling. A ruling by the Ecuadorian Supreme Court in 2019 blocked the oil leases and required the government to gain the consent of Indigenous communities about projects slated for their lands.

But while the case could set a precedent for other Amazonian peoples, Indigenous communities continue to face obstacles in their fight for control over their territories.

And in case you think that battles to protect the environment are only waged in distant forests, **Lucie Pinson**, a French environmental activist, launched a savvy and successful campaign that prodded major banks and insurance companies to stop financing and insuring coal projects and coal companies.

The list of women who stand up for environmental justice is long — and some have lost their lives in the struggle, like Berta Cáceres, whose fight to protect her Lenka people's territory from a dam project led to her assassination. March is a good month to remember them, to stand with them and to ask what more we can do to support them.

Here's what else is new on EarthBeat:

- Nushin Huq describes the February winter storm's devastating consequences inside homes throughout Texas — especially in underserved communities, where millions struggled to survive freezing temperatures, without heat or water.
- In Honduras, sisters are helping communities rebuild after two hurricanes struck the country in rapid succession, writes Greg Brekke for Global Sisters Report.
- The Rev. Jim Antal, a leading United Church of Christ minister, says people of faith must "advocate for the restoration of creation," reports Brian Roewe.
- Roewe also writes that during a recent interreligious dialogue, Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich said the adoption of Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home" has been hindered in part because some Catholics and other people of faith "have bought into a libertarian notion of the world and the economy as something that we are to dominate for our own profit."

- California's iconic coastal redwoods, some standing since before Julius Caesar ruled Rome, are increasingly threatened by wildfires that are larger and more intense because of human-caused climate change. Jeff Berardelli reports for CBS News as part of the Covering Climate Now consortium.
- The Biden administration is pulling back an environmental review that had cleared the way for a parcel of federal land held sacred by Apaches to be turned over for a massive copper mine in eastern Arizona, writes Felicia Fonseca for the Associated Press.
- EarthBeat's A Climate-Conscious Lent series continues, with Fr. Emmet Farrell reflecting this week on coral reefs and rising seas.

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Here's some of what's new in other climate news:

- In an effort to stem the flow of toxic runoff into waterways, the city of Cambridge, Massachusetts, is testing the use of a low-salt brine solution to clear icy streets. Former NCR Bertelsen intern Jesse Remedios reports on the pilot project for WBUR.
- A new U.N. report on food waste found that households around the world, in all income brackets, discard about 174 pounds of food a year, and that 17% of all the food produced in the world goes to waste. "If food waste was a country, it would have the third highest [greenhouse gas] emissions after only the US and China," writes Damian Carrington at The Guardian.
- Brett Chase at the Chicago Sun-Times reports that hunger strikers have ended a month-long protest against the relocation of a car-shredding business from an affluent, white neighborhood to Chicago's Hispanic- and Black-majority Southeast Side. That's the part of the city where environmental justice crusader Hazel Johnson, profiled by Roewe for EarthBeat, fought polluters for decades.
- Emily Holden at Floodlight, a new non-profit climate news organization partnering with The Guardian, describes how gas industry lobbyists in Texas and other states are undermining legislators' efforts to turn away from fossil fuels.

Upcoming events:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is hosting its third ecumenical dialogue about its recently published "Ecumenical and Interreligious Guidebook: Care for Our Common Home" on March 9 from 4:15 p.m. to 5:15 p.m. Eastern Time. The purpose of the dialogue is to gain greater insight into how caring for God's creation is fundamental to Christianity, how each of the participating churches is fulfilling this mission and how Christians can unite in caring for our common home. You can find more information about this and other upcoming events on the EarthBeat Events page.

The interfaith environmental network GreenFaith will sponsor "Sacred People, Sacred Earth," a global day of action, on March 11. You can learn more about how to participate here.

Closing beat:

Do you know a woman who is fighting for the right to a healthy environment for her family, her neighbors or the rest of us? She might be a well-known figure or a person who works at the grassroots, in her community. She could be a friend or a neighbor.

We'd like to share her story on EarthBeat. You can tell us about her in 150 words or less in a Small Earth Story or send us a message at earthbeat@ncronline.com, telling us why you admire her.

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