News
EarthBeat
A man and boy of the Uru-eu-wau-wau tribe inspect an area deforested by invaders on Indige

A man and boy of the Uru-eu-wau-wau tribe inspect an area deforested by invaders on Indigenous land near Campo Novo de Rondônia, Brazil, in 2019. (CNS photo/Ueslei Marcelino, Reuters)



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Editor's Note: *EarthBeat Weekly is your weekly newsletter about faith and climate change. Below is the Nov. 19 edition. To receive EarthBeat Weekly in your inbox, sign up here.*

As climate change dries out parts of Amazonian ecosystems, Indigenous communities are among those who stand to lose the most. That's a message that Indigenous leaders have been taking to climate summits, with gradually increasing visibility, for more than a decade.

But even participating in those events is fraught.

Txai Surui, a 24-year-old Indigenous activist from Brazil, spoke forcefully at the opening of the U.N. climate conference, COP26, in Glasgow, Scotland, telling of a childhood friend, Ari Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau, who was murdered for defending his people's territory. She added, "Indigenous people are on the front line of the climate emergency, and we must be at the center of the decisions happening here."

She urged her listeners — among them, more than 100 heads of state taking part in the opening world leaders summit — to "end the pollution of hollow words" and "fight for a livable future and present." The audience applauded, but Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who stayed away from the conference, attacked her, saying she had no right to criticize her country.

Txai Surui, a 24-year-old Indigenous activist from Brazil, addresses the opening session of the U.N. climate conference, COP26, Oct. 31 in Glasgow, Scotland.

Two weeks later, the home of another Indigenous leader, Alessandra Korap Munduruku, in Santarém, Brazil, was robbed and vandalized just after Munduruku returned from COP26. Seeing suspicious activity, she and her children had stayed elsewhere that night.

The verbal and physical aggression against these two Indigenous women is a continuation of the violence that each year claims the lives of hundreds of people worldwide who have worked to defend their land against powerful economic interests.

The violence shows how difficult it will be to meet climate targets without tackling the economic injustice that Pope Francis has pointed to as the underlying cause of climate change.

Pope Francis meets Jose Gregorio Diaz Mirabal, of Curripaco Indigenous people of Venezuela,

Pope Francis meets Jose Gregorio Diaz Mirabal during the Amazon synod in 2019. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

For Gregorio Díaz Mirabal, leader of COICA, an umbrella group of Amazonian Indigenous organizations, it remains to be seen whether the promises made at COP26 — including ending deforestation and helping Indigenous communities protect their forests and rivers — will be kept. The key, he said, is ensuring that Indigenous communities have legal rights to their territories, and that's a demand on

which various Amazonian countries continue to drag their feet.

Meanwhile, those communities steadfastly stand up to illegal activities in their territories, from wildcat gold mining to farming of drug crops. Often the products of those activities are greenwashed on the way to market.

Earlier this year, Patricia Gualinga, an Ecuadorian Indigenous leader who is also a lay member of the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon, told me that illegal loggers were stripping Ecuador's Amazonian watersheds of balsa trees. The lightweight wood was then exported legally — ironically, mainly to China to be used to manufacture wind turbine blades.

Patricia Gualinga, an Indigenous rights defender from Ecuador, speaks at a news conference a

Patricia Gualinga, an Indigenous rights defender from Ecuador, speaks at a news conference at the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon in 2019. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

The fast-growing balsa trees are found in low-lying areas where they help buffer the effects of floodwaters, Gualinga explained. By stripping the trees, the loggers leave communities at greater risk of more severe flooding — all in the name of "green" energy.

When I spoke to Díaz this week, he had some specific post-COP26 requests of people in the United States. First, he said, they must "insist that the president keep his promise that the Amazon forest will remain standing." They must also ensure that the activities of U.S. companies do not result in deforestation, he added, and they should urge the U.S. government to use its influence to keep Amazonian countries from financing activities that lead to deforestation.

There is plenty of work to be done in following up the pledges made in Glasgow, say Catholic activists, who add that although some progress was made at the summit, it was not nearly enough and not fast enough, as NCR environment correspondent Brian Roewe reports.

As Indigenous leaders point out repeatedly, many of the decisions made — and not made — at the climate conference raise justice issues, which are matters on which Catholics must speak out and take action, an NCR editorial argues.

With a world stage in Glasgow, Txai Surui stated that "the Earth is speaking; she tells us we have no more time." The deadline, she said, is "not 2030 or 2050 — it's now."

Here's what else is new on EarthBeat:

- In the wake of COP26, people of faith are not waiting for politicians to act, but are taking action themselves, write Tomás Insua of the Laudato Si' Movement and Dan Misleh of Catholic Climate Covenant in a commentary.
- One avenue for action is the Laudato Si' Action Platform, which the Vatican officially launched Nov. 14, and which invites Catholics worldwide to take concrete action on sustainability and climate change, as Roewe reports.
- Dan Stockman of Global Sisters Report writes about a workshop at which religious participants heard that if investments are part of a congregation's charism, then those investments not only should not harm the Earth, but should actively improve it.
- Lucien Chauvin at Catholic News Service reports that environmental issues will have a prominent place on the agenda during the Sixth Latin American Ecclesial Assembly to be held Nov. 21-28 in Mexico City and virtually around the region.
- Kenya's bishops have urged the country's leaders to take measures to relieve the impact of a drought that is affecting millions of people in more than 12 arid and semi-arid counties, writes Frederick Nzwili for Catholic News Service.
- U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announced that her agency will protect and improve access for Indigenous people to sites they hold sacred, reports Emily McFarlan Miller at Religion News Service.

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

- Severe flooding and landslides, possibly exacerbated by summer wildfires, left some 18,000 people stranded in British Columbia, after heavy rains pounded

the Pacific Northwest and western Canada, reports Leyland Cecco for The Guardian. Those weather extremes are consistent with scientists' predictions about climate change.

- Also in British Columbia, the Gidimt'en Clan of the Wet'suwet'en Nation is facing off against a pipeline construction company that it says is illegally invading its territory. Kate Partridge has the story for CBC News.
- Jason Arunn Murugesu at New Scientist talked with climate negotiators from small island nations about the physical and emotional toll of the talks at the U.N. climate conference in Glasgow.
- The U.S. House of Representatives passed a $2 trillion spending bill that includes funds for tackling climate change, writes Tony Romm at the Washington Post.
- Meanwhile, the Interior Department is auctioning 308 oil and gas blocks in the Gulf of Mexico, after a court ordered that the leasing round, which had been suspended by the administration, must go on, report Matthew Brown and Janet McConnaughey at the Associated Press.
- Is the shift from shopping in person to shopping online, which accelerated with the COVID-19 pandemic, better or worse for the environment? It's complicated, writes Catherine Boudreau at Politico.

Upcoming events:

This week's events include a discussion Nov. 22 of Thomas Merton's exploration of Sufism, sponsored by the Deignan Institute for Earth and Spirit at Iona College.

You can find more information about this and other events on the EarthBeat Events page, and you can add your own group's events here.

Closing beat:

Autumn may be chilling things out in the northern hemisphere, but here in Lima, Peru, where I live, spring seems finally to have settled in. Basil and dill seedlings are sprouting on my kitchen windowsill and mangoes are in season. They remind me to be grateful for the gifts of the Earth and the hands that harvest them.

And as Thanksgiving approaches, we at EarthBeat are grateful for you, our readers. We wish you a happy and blessed Thanksgiving Day with family and friends. Thank you for reading EarthBeat!

This story appears in the **EarthBeat Weekly** feature series. View the full series.