


Interfaith environmental protestors blocked the entrance doors of Citigroup's headquarters on July 30 in downtown New York. (NCR photo/Camillo Barone)



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About 50 interfaith environmental leaders and activists, including Catholics, gathered at 7:30 a.m. Tuesday (July 30) outside the Downtown New York main headquarters of investment bank company Citigroup to protest the group's investments in fossil fuel industry projects.

About 40 NYPD units responded to quell the peaceful demonstration, which resulted in the arrest of 24 activists, mainly Jewish, Catholic, Quaker, Episcopalian and Methodist. The demonstrators blocked the entrance to the building for 40 minutes. About 300 Citigroup employees had to wait until the protests were over before they could enter to work.

The protest was part of the "Summer of Heat on Wall St." Faith Week, held one week within three months of protests in New York and New Jersey against corporations and financial leaders investing in fossil fuels.

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"All of the large U.S. banks, including Citi, are the worst funders of the climate crisis in the world. And since the Paris Climate Agreement was signed, no bank has put more money into fossil fuel industry projects than Citi. We know that that creates climate change, which leads to enormous suffering, loss of life, forced migration, loss of livelihoods, the spread of disease, loss of well-being, due to severe weather damage, droughts," said the Rev. Fletcher Harper, executive director at Greenfaith, an international interreligious environmental organization that is promoting Summer of Heat's Faith Week.

Protesters will return to the plaza outside Citigroup's New York headquarters for another peaceful protest at 4 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 1 and on Friday, Aug. 2, they will gather in Newark, New Jersey, to protest Formosa Plastics, a petrochemical company that is working to open a large petrochemical plant in St. James Parish, Louisiana, a low-income Black community already affected in the past by toxic

contamination and air pollution from other nearby petrochemical plants. Advocates of Rise St. James, a faith-based environmental organization, traveled from Louisiana to New York to take part in protests against Citigroup and Formosa Plastics.*

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"Citi welcomes continued engagement with our stakeholders and we are transparent about our climate-related activities. We are supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy through our net zero commitments and our $1 trillion sustainable finance goal," said a Citigroup spokesperson in a statement. "Our approach reflects the need to transition while also continuing to meet global energy needs."

Frank Ramirez, a Catholic environmental activist from Lake Charles, Louisiana, was arrested this morning by the New York Police Department while taking part in protests outside the  building. His brother, Darvin Ramirez, a 43-year-old Catholic musician from Lake Charles, who also was participating in the demonstration, told NCR that the consequences of building new liquid gas and oil facilities in the Marshlands would be "devastating."

"The fishing, shrimp and crab industries have already been hit. There are signs on our waterfront that say you can't eat no more than three fish a month because it's so heavily contaminated with ethylene dichloride," Darvin Ramirez said. "I've heard that they have been secretly buying out residents in the neighborhood, moving them to another neighborhood on the south side of town, in hopes of transforming our community into an industrial district without having a fight."

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>
> — Darvin Ramirez
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Katherine Hahn, a Catholic, Houston-based coordinator at Gulf South Fossil Finance Hub and deputy chapter animator of the Texas Chapter of the Laudato Si' Movement , a global network of over 900 Catholic environmental organizations, also flew from

Texas to express her dissent and take part in the Summer of Heat's Faith Week protests. After the demonstration, she told Earthbeat she could hear the screams of a fellow activist being "violently torn" against the chains of a Citigroup door he was locked to today.

"I'm from the United States Gulf Coast, where there is a plethora of fossil fuel infrastructure, sometimes in the same areas where people live, work, and go to school. These projects are perpetuating the environmental racism that has existed in this area and exacerbating a health crisis due to the emissions pollution that comes from these plants, resulting in cancer, asthma, skin conditions and early death of people living in the Gulf South," she said.

"There are about 22 new proposed fossil fuel projects for the Gulf South, where people are already overburdened at a rate disproportionate to the rest of our country," Hahn added.




A demonstrator, Lina Blout of Earth Quaker Action Team,* is arrested and dragged by the New York Police Department outside Citigroup’s headquarters on July 30 in New York. (NCR photo/Camillo Barone)

Liam Myers, a volunteer at the Catholic Worker community in New York's Lower East Side and adjunct professor of religious studies at Iona University in New Rochelle, New York, told EarthBeat that his advocacy work for climate justice is "inseparable" from the fight against homelessness, hunger and poverty in New York City, where numerous unprecedented heat waves have exacerbated the city's social emergencies. These factors combined led him to protest outside  headquarters.

"It's really sad to see so much indifference, and my faith always calls me to be on the side of the oppressed. We hear that from Pope Francis and from other liberation theologians who say that the cry of the Earth is the same as the cry of the poor," he said.

**This paragraph has been updated to correct location information, and a cutline was updated to identify Lina Blout.*

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