News
EarthBeat



Australians burst into joy in Quito, Ecuador, Sept. 15, 2024, the last day of the 53rd International Eucharistic Congress, as they learn that the 54th congress will be held in Sydney in 2028. (OSV News/courtesy International Eucharistic Congress)



Eduardo Campos Lima

View Author Profile

OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

QUITO, ECUADOR — September 18, 2024
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

As Ecuador's International Eucharistic Congress wrapped up in the country's capital, Quito, Australians burst into joy as the announcement was made that they will host the 54th congress in 2028.

Other significant moments during the congress came when speakers focused on the church's environmental concerns and the need to take care of the Earth — our "common home."

The International Eucharistic Congress is held every four years, and the gathering in Sydney is expected to draw tens of thousands of faithful Catholics from across the globe.

Archbishop Anthony Fisher of Sydney, present at the final Mass in Quito Sept. 15, said that this will be the largest gathering held on Australian shores since World Youth Day 2008.

"The International Eucharistic Congress is a joyous occasion that will deepen our understanding of the truth of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist," he said.

"It is my hope that in hosting the International Eucharistic Congress we might renew the sense of solemnity, mystery, welcome and joy in the liturgical life of our city, revitalize our Christian lives, and increase our outreach to those most in need," Fisher said.

The bid to host the event had the backing of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia and will see Sydney become

the global capital of Catholicism for one week.

The highlights of the event will be the large opening and closing Masses and a Eucharistic procession through the streets of Sydney.

The IEC in Quito concluded with such a procession Sept. 14 and with a closing Eucharistic celebration Sept. 15 with presider Cardinal Baltazar Porras Cardozo, retired archbishop of Caracas, Venezuela, and pontifical legate for the congress. On both occasions, as well as in several moments of the congress, the need to take care of the Earth — our "common home" — was emphasized.

The message was especially timely as South America faces some of the most serious wildfires in its history.

According to Brazil's National Institute for Space Research, as of September, there have been more than 346,000 wildfires in South America this year, especially in Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Argentina and Paraguay. The figure surpassed the previous annual record set in 2007. The monitoring study of fires began in 1998.

A serious drought in most of the region has created the ideal conditions for the spread of wildfires. In many cases, ranchers begin a fire in order to clear the terrain and prepare the soil for the seeds. With the lack of humidity, the flames end up spreading throughout the vegetation, provoking broad devastation. That has been the case in the Amazon rainforest, especially in Brazil.

In his homily, Porras said that "care for the common home is a fruit of fraternity." He added that Latin America is "a continent devastated by the irrational exploitation of nature," recalled the Synod for the Pan-Amazon region, promoted in 2019, and said that nature is a dimension that cannot be ignored.

On the previous day, Archbishop Luis Cabrera of Guayaquil, Ecuador, who led the Eucharistic procession, said that "God loves this earth, many times contaminated and exploited." By believing in Jesus, he said, the faithful have the strength to feel they are the "administrators and not owners of the Earth's goods."

Advertisement

The most important moment of the congress when the church's environmental concerns were addressed occurred Sept. 13, when Bishop Rafael Cob of Puyo, Ecuador, who heads the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network, known by its Spanish acronym REPAM, talked about the rainforest.

"The contemplation of God in the Eucharist may lead us to see that the human being is devastating his creation," Cob told OSV News.

The Eucharist must lead us not only to a commitment to our brothers and sisters, but also to our common home, he added.

"God's creation, manifested in the Amazon, needs to be taken care of and defended from its destroyers," Cob said.

He added that REPAM has been working in that direction since its foundation in 2014, with the goal not only of protecting the environment but also of being side by side with the Amazonian peoples, whose rights have been continually violated.

Bishop José Adalberto Jiménez of the Aguarico Vicariate, Ecuador, who attended the whole event, felt that the theme of the protection of the Amazon and of the "common home" as a whole should have been mentioned with more intensity at the Eucharistic congress, given the seriousness of the current crisis.

"We have been facing a strong drought in Ecuador and there are wildfires in several provinces. River Napo, which begins in Ecuador, crosses Peru and reaches River Solimões in Brazil, "is terribly low now," Jiménez told OSV News.

In Aguarico, the church has been continually denouncing the presence of 300 backhoes near River Punino. The machines are operated by illegal miners connected to large drug trafficking gangs. Illegal mining has been severely impacting the region and the local communities, but the authorities haven't taken any measure against it, Jiménez lamented.

"We also have to deal with oil drilling in the area. More than 500 lighters have been burning without pause, causing many problems for the environment and for the people's health," he added.

Jiménez stressed that REPAM has launched several initiatives to protect the environment and help the Amazon to recover.

"But we certainly don't have any power to deal with illegal miners. They have equipment and guns, and the authorities fail to act. We denounced them, but we feel impotent," he lamented.

In the opinion of Cob, the fact that people from almost 60 countries attended the congress and heard the reports concerning the Amazon's devastation generates hope.

"As Christians, we are called to cultivate fraternity in a world with so many divisions. We are also invited to struggle for the environment, to struggle for the Amazon. I think people from several countries are taking back with them that message," Cob concluded.

This story appears in the **Synod for the Amazon** feature series. View the full series .