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Cacti in desert

Cacti are seen on a section of the Sonoran Desert region in Tucson, Ariz., Nov. 30, 2024. At the U.N. biodiversity summit, which officially ended Feb. 28 in Rome, nations reached deals on mobilizing funds and monitoring conservation commitments. (OSV News/Bob Roller)



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Nations under the global biodiversity pact resolved unfinished business in late February, reaching deals on mobilizing funds and monitoring conservation commitments.

Faith groups who followed the resumed negotiations in Rome for the COP16 United Nations biodiversity summit applauded the developments and pledged to do their part to support the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the international agreement that seeks "peace with nature" by reversing the rapid tide of ecosystem and species loss by midcentury.

They also welcomed a decision that will allow faith-based and other civil society organizations to report their own conservation commitments directly to the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity that oversees the agreement.

"Our coalition is now focused on equipping our members with the resources and support to monitor GBF implementation within their communities, advocate for stronger commitments, and drive action toward a nature-positive world," said Gopal Patel, co-coordinator of the Faiths for Biodiversity coalition.

truck of garbage near body of water

Workers dump waste into a landfill just beside the Dhaleshwari River in Savar, Bangladesh, March 7, 2023. (OSV News/Reuters/Mohammad Ponir Hossain)

The U.N. biodiversity summit officially concluded Feb. 28, four months after the biannual talks began in Cali, Colombia. It was the first meeting following the historic adoption in 2022 of the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Under the pact dubbed a "Paris Agreement for nature," countries set four goals and 23 targets to halt biodiversity loss and restore natural ecosystems around the globe. As many as 1 million species are at risk of extinction, while climate change, mining, agriculture and deforestation threaten the planet's most critical biomes. One of the GBF's major aims is to designate at least 30% of lands and waters for conservation by 2030.

While in Colombia, negotiators for 195 nations — all but the United States and the Holy See — agreed to create a permanent advisory body for Indigenous peoples and local communities, but they were unable to reach consensus on several other matters. Those discussions restarted in February in Rome.

One issue not addressed in Colombia was finance, and in particular how to mobilize resources to developing countries, who have criticized existing structures as difficult to access and controlled by wealthy nations. In Rome, countries compromised on a road map to establish criteria to evaluate current financial structures and determine if a new entity is required. The selected fund is to be operating by 2030.

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Flore Ghetti, a policy lead for Faiths for Biodiversity who followed the negotiations in Rome, said the deal was met with a standing ovation.

"If we did not reach consensus on this one, it would have been very difficult to adopt any other decisions," she said.

Under the GBF, countries agreed to raise $200 billion annually by 2030 from public and private sources. Developed countries so far have committed roughly $11 billion of the $20 billion they pledged by 2025, a goal that increases to $30 billion annually in 2030.

Other decisions in Rome aimed to streamline biodiversity funding and to monitor countries' progress in meeting nationally set conservation targets. So far, 47 countries have submitted biodiversity action plans and 125 have set new national targets.

Former U.S. President Joe Biden committed the country to its own 30x30 goal, though that is likely to be abandoned by the Trump administration.

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Amy Echevarria, international coordinator for justice, peace and integrity of creation with the Missionary Society of St. Columban, said it was "heartening" to see countries make progress in Rome on key issues to protect and restore the biological web of life, "especially at a time when collaboration on the global stage is fragile, largely due to U.S. isolationism."

As part of decisions about reporting and monitoring countries' progress, negotiators also agreed to allow non-state actors, including faith-based organizations, to report their own work on implementing the biodiversity framework directly to the U.N. convention.

"It's important because faith communities are on the frontline for biodiversity conservation," said Ghetti, program coordinator on environment, sustainability and youth for Soka Gakkai International, a Buddhist organization. "They are local communities most of the time. They work at the local level, they have a lot of projects on biodiversity restoration and conservation … and so it's important for

them to be able to report that."

In Cali, the faith coalition released a new report detailing the work of 27 faith communities to restore degraded ecosystems and protect biodiversity.

While such documents spotlight some of the faith-based conservation, Ghetti said the ability to report directly through the biodiversity convention will allow more organizations to register their contributions to national biodiversity actions. Governments, however, retained the ability to object to publishing non-state actors' inputs.

During the COP16 negotiations in Rome, countries also launched the Cali Fund, which directs a percentage of profits or revenue from companies using data from genetic resources in nature to conservation efforts, with at least half allocated to Indigenous people and local communities.

At the next biodiversity summit, scheduled for 2026 in Armenia, countries will take stock of their progress in implementing their biodiversity goals.

Faith groups say the focus in the interim must be on more nations submitting and enacting ambitious national biodiversity plans.

"The biodiversity crisis requires urgent action," said Blair Nelsen, executive director of Waterspirit and U.N. representative for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace. "As Pope Francis wrote in *Laudate Deum*, 'The world sings of an infinite Love: how can we fail to care for it?' "