News
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Participants in the multifaith dialogue of the Global Ethical Stocktake stand together in prayer in the Borgo Laudato Si', Italy Oct. 1. A group of 35 Catholics, religious leaders, Indigenous, environmental activists and academics participated. (Laudato Si' Movement/José Javier Garcia Cabrera)



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If humans know what needs to be done to address climate change and already possess many of the tools and technologies to do so, why are they not doing it?

That is the central question behind the Global Ethical Stocktake, what's been called a groundbreaking initiative developed by the United Nations and the government of Brazil that has hosted the latest U.N. climate conference, known as COP30.

The Global Ethical Stocktake, or GES, is an effort to bring morality and ethics more fully into the discourse around climate change typically dominated by political, technological and economic frames.

Throughout two weeks at COP30, Brazilian environment and climate minister and GES chair Marina Silva has delivered a persistent refrain across countless panels, interviews and high-level meetings: The solutions to climate change are not technical, they are ethical.

A leading voice behind Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's ambitious proposal for a roadmap to phase out fossil fuels, Silva called it "an ethical answer" to the scientific knowledge of the extent of the climate crisis in an interview with The Guardian.

> 'If governments are not changing, then we need another power. That power is our faith.'
> —Jesuit Fr. Rigobert Minani
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"I often say we already possess virtually all the technical solutions for climate change, biodiversity loss, and even pressing social issues," Silva said at the GES

launch in June. "What is needed is the ethical commitment to apply our technical capabilities and accelerate our political decisions, ensuring we fulfill what we've already committed to."

Such a cultural change is badly needed to shake climate negotiations from its too-prevalent low ambition, say people of faith involved in the Global Ethical Stocktake. They hope it doesn't end with COP30's conclusion, but becomes more formally embedded into the U.N. process.

"It's really put on the agenda the fact that it's not just about these technical or financial levers that need to be pulled," said Laura Cook, a senior strategist with the women-led climate justice group Project Dandelion. It's also about "how do we have the behavior change needed as humanity and the solidarity needed as humanity to do what we all know we need to do in the next few years?"

Ethical compass for climate policy

In its preparations as COP30's host country, the Brazilian government devised the Global Ethical Stocktake as a way to convene diverse voices around the ethical commitments and practices in dealing with climate change.

One inspiration for the initiative was Pope Francis.

The late Argentine pope was widely considered the leading moral voice on environmental crises facing the planet. His 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home" injected a new vocabulary like "common home" into U.N. climate talks and provided a foundational justice framework with his plea "to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."



COP 30 President André Corrêa do Lago, center, speaks during a panel at the Global Ethical Stocktake Pavillion during the COP30 United Nations climate change conference Nov. 12 in Belém, Brazil. (COP30/Rafa Pereira)

André Corrêa do Lago, COP30 president, in one of his pre-COP letters wrote that the Brazilian government considers *Laudato Si*' "as both an ethical compass and a pragmatic guide for this global mobilization" of the GES.

The Brazilian government officially launched the GES on June 17 — a day before the 10-year anniversary of the public release of Francis' encyclical.

It was devised as a complement to the Global Stocktake required every five years under the Paris Agreement to measure progress in its implementation. The GS measures how countries are fulfilling their climate goals (known as "nationally determined contributions"); the GES aims to consider shifts in behavior and values necessary to align with countries' commitments under the Paris Agreement, namely to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) and by doing so, avoid more catastrophic climate impacts.

Ahead of the Belém summit, the stocktake arranged six regional dialogues on six continents. Each included diverse voices — Indigenous, scientists, youth, policymakers, businesspeople, religious leaders and more. Five questions guided conversations, addressing why climate science goes ignored, why humanity continues production and consumption models out of step with the Paris goals, and how cultural and spiritual practices about living in harmony with nature can inspire the ethical changes needed to address climate change.



Brazilian environment minister Marina Silva, left, and former Irish president Mary Robinson speak during the first regional dialogue under the Global Ethical Stocktake at the Royal Botanic Gardens outside London on June 24. (COP30 Brasil Amazônia/Rafa Neddermeyer)

The first dialogue took place in London in June, co-led by Mary Robinson, the former Irish president and co-founder of Project Dandelion, and Silva, who joined all the continental conversations.

At COP30 in Belém, Brazilian and U.N. officials presented results and outcomes from the regional dialogues. A Global Ethical Stocktake Pavilion housed further discussions.

Karenna Gore, executive director of the Center of Earth Ethics at Union Theological Center in New York and co-leader of the North American dialogue, took part in many of the GES events in Belém. She said that ethical and spiritual dimensions have too often been given "short shrift" in climate proceedings compared to science, technology and financing, but are actually vital in moving people and societies to act.

"Ethics is most powerful when a deeply felt and more and more widely shared sense of right and wrong is out of step with both laws and social norms in a society," she told National Catholic Reporter's EarthBeat, pointing to examples in U.S. history like slavery and the civil rights movement.

"Most of what is causing the climate crisis is perfectly legal, and it's even socially encouraged," Gore said. "So if we're going to make a change, we actually have to draw from a deeper well of conscience, of values, of wisdom. And historically … faith and religion very much fed that in many ways."

Laudato Si'-guided dialogue

In addition to the official continental dialogues, GES organizers invited self-managed dialogues to take place across the world. One took place in October amid the vibrant and lush green papal gardens of Castel Gandolfo, the centuries-old summer respite for popes.

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Thirty-five Catholic and other faith leaders participated in the conversation at the Borgo Laudato Si', part of the Raising Hope for Climate Justice conference that celebrated the 10-year anniversary of *Laudato Si*'. Among participants were Silva, Brazilian Cardinal Jaime Spengler, Sr. Maamalifar Poreku of the International Union of Superiors General, Kichwa Indigenous leader Patricia Gualinga and climate activist Bill McKibben.

The dialogue was facilitated by Cook of Project Dandelion's Women, Faith & Climate Network, which co-hosted with Laudato Si' Movement and GreenFaith.

The conversations focused on what faith traditions can offer through its values and practices to support a life-giving future and how they can mobilize more people and countries to support the just and ethical changes that climate change requires.

"If governments are not changing, then we need another power. That power is our faith," Jesuit Fr. Rigobert Minani, regional coordinator of the Ecclesial Network of the Congo Basin Forest, said in the dialogue.



Lorna Gold, executive director of the Laudato Si' Movement, takes part in the first regional dialogue of the Global Ethical Stocktake at the Royal Botanic Gardens outside London June 24. (COP30 Amazônia/Isabela Castilho)

Lorna Gold, executive director of the Laudato Si' Movement, said in an interview the experience brought "fresh air" to discourses about climate policy that are dominated by rational and transactional lines of thinking at the expense of "the deeper capacity

and essential need of humans to care, to empathise, to love."

"It felt like someone had opened the windows and allowed us to show up as human beings," Gold said.

"This felt exciting, full of possibilities — and led to entirely different conversations around the shared narratives of hope, renewal, connectedness," she added.

More than words, the Borgo dialogue put forward a series of proposed actions. One was the "people's determined contributions" — a series of individual and community commitments to climate actions — as a counterpoint to countries' nationally determined contributions, which if fully implemented would hold global warming between 2.3 C and 2.8 C, with average temperature rise likely to exceed 1.5 C in the next decade.



Activists hang banners while participating in a demonstration at the COP30 U.N. Climate Summit Nov. 21 in Belém, Brazil. (AP/Andre Penner)

"It is not about letting politicians off the hook but about generating a tsunami of planetary action from the grassroots up," Gold said. "That action is there, especially amongst the faiths, but now is the moment to make it visible so as [to] galvanize more."

Ethics post-COP30

Where the GES goes after COP30 is uncertain. There have been calls to make it a part of the official process in years ahead.

"We need a decision in this COP to say the Global Ethical Stocktake will continue to the next [COP]," Gold said during an interview with the climate action group We Don't Have Time.

For Gold, a Scottish-born Catholic, the GES provides a way for civil society and the people to have a greater voice in the climate talks. Polls have shown 80% to 89% of people globally want governments to take stronger action on climate change.

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Since their conception in October, Laudato Si' Movement has collected 1,500 People's Determined Contributions. It aims to present a collective contribution from the global Catholic Church at COP31 primarily through commitments to the Vatican's Laudato Si' Action Platform. In addition, it has partnered with the Global Citizens' Assembly to expand the initiative beyond the faith community.

"The way to restore ambition of Paris is for the non-state actors — like the faiths, like the business community, like broader civil society, cultural institutions — to have a collective mechanism to show our commitment," Gold said during the We Don't Have Time interview.

Increasingly, many see the Global Ethical Stocktake as a cog in that mechanism.

"This feels like the thing that could actually really help push and boost everything," Cook said. "This recognition that we can't silo off technical and financial shifts from what it means to be a human, which is to respond to things through our moral frameworks, through our ethical frameworks, and ultimately, through our beliefs and through our faith."

This story appears in the **COP30 Brazil** feature series. View the full series.