



In his video message **for Earth Day 2021 Pope Francis** noted that nature teaches us interdependence as well as what we need to do to create “a fair, equitable, environmentally safe planet”. Noting that both global catastrophes, **COVID and climate change**, show that there is no time to lose, he made an appeal to world leaders “to act with courage, to act with justice and to always tell people the truth” so that people know how to “protect themselves from the destruction of the planet, and how to protect the planet from the destruction that we very often trigger”. In this issue of News from the UN we highlight recent UN sessions and related events that address **our relationship to Mother Earth** – our common home.



➡ [Watch a short video](#)

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.



“Peace, justice and strong institutions: the role of indigenous peoples in implementing **Sustainable Development Goal 16**” was the theme of the **20th UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII)** held over a two week period in April. Speaking during the Opening session, the **President of the General Assembly, Volkan Bozkir**, noted that indigenous peoples are the stewards of more than 80% of the world’s biodiversity, and highlighted the importance of their inclusion in decisions related to the climate crisis.



In his opening remarks The **UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres** noted that indigenous peoples are three times more likely to live in extreme poverty than other groups and that their languages and cultures are under constant threat. Lack of access to basic social services during COVID has increased their vulnerability. Since indigenous peoples' lands are among the world’s most biodiverse and resource-rich on the planet, they have been subject to increasing exploitation for commercial interests. Conflict over resources has led to attacks against indigenous leaders and environmental defenders, as well as rampant deforestation. He stressed the importance of respect for their rights, ensuring equal and meaningful participation, full inclusion and empowerment and underlining their indispensable role in achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. Recent calls for action to recognize Indigenous peoples' rights to lands have been made in the **UN Human Rights Council**, challenging a narrow and extractivist model of development which puts corporate interests and money over people and planet. ➡ [Watch a video](#)

Did you know that:

- **370-500 million indigenous people** in the world are spread across **90 countries** in all geographic regions, representing **5,000 different cultures**.
- Their territories encompass approximately **22% of the world’s land surface** and are estimated to hold **80% of the planet’s biodiversity**.
- Nearly **70 million indigenous women and men depend on forests** for their livelihoods, and many more are farmers, hunter gatherers or pastoralists
- Indigenous communities’ contribution to fighting climate change is far greater than previously acknowledged. **Their forestlands store at least one quarter of all above-ground tropical forest carbon**, equivalent to **4 times the total global carbon emissions in 2014**.
- Approximately **100 uncontacted tribes** live in the **Amazon rainforest**. As hunter-gatherers, they’re uniquely in tune with their environment and have vast botanical and zoological expertise.

Voices from below...

During the Permanent forum on Indigenous Issues, our **NGO Mining Working Group (MWG)** partnered with **REPAM** (the network of Episcopal Conferences of the Amazon) **CIMI** (The Indigenist Missionary Council of Brazil) and other international networks to present three parallel events. These brought the voices and experiences of grassroots women and men from indigenous groups in Latin America (Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador) to the UN through panel events on Zoom. A common thread running through all the panels was their symbiotic relationship to the land, and the lack of access to justice when corporate or corrupt government interests take precedence, displacing people from their ancestral homes.



Co-sponsored by the **Holy See Mission to the UN, REPAM and CIMI**, the first MWG event focused on the increased **violations of human rights in the Amazon region during the time of COVID 19**. Indigenous representatives from the Brazilian, Ecuadorian and Peruvian Amazon shared moving testimony regarding the human rights abuses and the increased vulnerability of their peoples. The negative impact of mining on health, livelihoods and access to uncontaminated water resources during this time of pandemic was highlighted, as were the threats posed and violence done to those who seek to defend the environment while lacking access to justice. ➡ [Read more](#)



“**Indigenous women linking north-south lands**” brought together women from **Brazil, Ecuador and Peru** with indigenous women from 3 different native American indigenous peoples from the **United States**. The latter included a Cherokee Episcopalian bishop and a Mohawk Catholic sister. They shared their deep wisdom and experience of religious beliefs, practice and spirituality. Common to all their sharing was the awareness of the importance of every element of creation as well as their conviction that all life is interconnected. → [Read more....](#)

The Right to a Healthy Environment

Although the right to a healthy environment is recognized by more than 150 UN member states, it has never been formally acknowledged at the global level in the form of a UN convention or treaty. In a recent joint statement submitted to the **UN Human Rights Council** and noting a call made by 1,100 NGOS, 15 UN agencies argued that this has exacerbated inequalities, created protection gaps and delayed the achievement of the **SDGs**. This is especially pertinent to environmental rights defenders as well as indigenous peoples who are key to safeguarding the environment. Highlighting the triple environmental crisis, namely climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution, they call for the Human Rights’ Council to take leadership in facilitating the global recognition, implementation and protection of the human right to a healthy environment as a fundamental human right. → [Watch a short video](#)



On Earth Day, the **Biden Administration** took a significant step in the **US** return to the global effort to address climate change by organizing a virtual Leaders Summit on Climate. The first ever **first ever US climate finance plan** was announced and a new **Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)** to the goals of the **Paris climate agreement** was named. In their turn... world leaders updated their commitments.. → [Watch a short video](#)

Éscazu Agreement.

On Earth Day 2021, the **Escazu Agreement** entered into force. This is a ground-breaking Regional Agreement in Latin America and the Caribbean and the first-ever legally binding agreement on Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters. It seeks to protect the intergenerational right to a healthy environment, with sustainable development by ensuring access to environmental information, public participation in environmental decisions, and access to justice in environmental matters. It addresses several important and urgent issues within the field of business and human



rights aimed at ending corporate impunity, and feeds into the current

negotiations leading towards a legally binding treaty on business and human rights.

→ [Watch the video](#)



RSHM News Briefs

★ The **Model UN programme** gives student the opportunity to practice skills of debate, international diplomacy and advocacy on current global issues. With this year’s theme featuring “**The Responsibility of Freedom**” eleven students from Marymount International School, Rome, joined with 600 peers from around the world at the **Rome International Model UN Conference (RIMUN)** held virtually this year. Issues addressed by the Conference included forced displacement, protecting the rights of refugees and supporting social inclusion and empowerment. **Marymount** was assigned to represent three countries: **Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Armenia**.



★ **Colegio SCM, in Fatima** won their thirteen flag this year in the **Eco-schools programme in Portugal**. This is an award that is given annually to schools that comply with the requirements of this international educational programme for environmental sustainability. Although their planned activities have been limited by the school closures due to **COVID 19**, **Colegio SCM Fatima** has been creative in establishing an online platform, on which initiatives by class can be shared, points assigned and a winning class identified. Their mission is to “save the planet” and to encourage actions which address the **3 Rs: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle** challenge.



★ The **RSHM JPIC / UN NGO team** met virtually on April 28th. Included in their meeting was the approval of a statement and discussion of areas for action on the RSHM General Chapter priority related to JPIC /NGO at global level. At the end of the meeting, **Sipiwe Phiri RSHM**, the liaison member of the Institute Leadership team, shared a blessing on **Mary Jo**



McElroy RSHM who completes 6 years as JPIC International Coordinator as well as welcoming the incoming Coordinator, **Virginia Dorgan RSHM**

Distribution

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