

INTERFAITH RAINFOREST INITIATIVE UPDATES – First Quarter 2023

BRAZIL

IRI Brazil launches local chapter, prepares for launches in nine state capitals of the Brazilian Amazon

IRI Brazil has launched its first chapter in the state of Acre and is preparing over the coming two months to launch chapters in the capital cities of all nine states of the Brazilian Amazon. The IRI Brazil chapter in Acre has already started work on an action plan and a dedicated campaign on reducing deforestation and forest fires in the state. Advance visits have been coordinated by the IRI Brazil team to Amazonas, Pará and Tocantins, with plans to launch chapters in May. Groundwork is currently underway around the establishment of state capital chapters in the five other Amazon states which will be launched between June and August. IRI Brazil aims to have 30 chapters launched across the nine states of the Brazilian Amazon by the end of 2023.

IRI Brazil strengthens outreach to religious institutions, Evangelical organizations on forests and the rights of indigenous peoples

IRI Brazil has deepened its relationships with a number of large religious institutions in the country and has provided high-level briefings on the program for senior leaders at major religious forums. Key partnerships and relationships have been established with large Catholic institutions that are active in Brazil and Latin America, including Panamazonian Ecclesial Network, the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Council, the Laudato Si' Movement, and the Amazon Ecclesial Conference – CELAM. All organizations have been briefed on IRI Brazil, its mission and work plan, and engaged to designate delegates to participate in IRI Brazil chapters across the country. IRI Brazil has also strengthened ties with Evangelical networks, including groups like the Amazonizar Network (active throughout the Amazon), the Presbyterian churches of Manaus, the Baptist Life Community of Acre, the Brazilian Spiritist Federation, and the Assemblies of God churches, which has 20 million followers in Brazil. IRI Brazil has also delivered several high-level briefings, including to the third Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Congress in Bogotá, the Southern Cone Regional Assembly of the Synod of Synods in Brasilia, and the 60th General Assembly of the Bishops of Brazil.

IRI Brazil continues screenings of Amazonia Viva, virtual reality film that transports viewers to the rainforest

IRI Brazil continues to screen Amazonia Viva at important events across the country and to senior policymakers, including the Minister of Cities and leaders of the Ministry of Environment including André Lima (Extraordinary Secretary for Deforestation Control and Territorial Planning) and Mauro Pires (Advisor to the Executive Secretary). Recent screenings include the International Symposium on Indigenous Law, which is promoted by the Supreme Court of Justice of Brazil and Rio2C, the largest creative event in Latin America. IRI Brazil is also taking

the “Amazônia Viva” immersive experience one step further by discussing a possible partnership with the Noar Company, an olfactory technology startup. The idea is to evaluate the feasibility of incorporating the smells of the forest within the virtual reality glasses. Discussions are currently being held with Raul do Vale (WWF Brazil's public policy director), Márcio Nakanishi (Otolaryngologist), and Cláudia Galvão (Noar's CEO). IRI Brazil has also partnered with a team of scientist volunteers and behavioral scientists to elaborate a project to measure the impact the film is having on engaging people to defend the Amazon Forest. IRI Brazil has also called upon Ana Arruda, director of the “Instituto Iluminante” and specialist in the dissemination of virtual reality and metaverse films to start sharing the “Amazônia Viva” film on a national and international level.

IRI Brazil participates in key policy discussions on forests and the rights of indigenous peoples

IRI Brazil is working to advance policies for a sustainable Amazon and is participating in processes to accompany and monitor policymaking. As one example, IRI Brazil participated in the public consultation on the Amazon Deforestation Control Plan, which was presented by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change. IRI Brazil presented a proposal to expand the mechanisms for civil society participation in the management of the Plan, creating space for religious representation within the Technical-Scientific Committees that will meet annually to discuss strategies to reduce deforestation rates in the Amazon. Working through these committees, IRI Brazil will be able to make recommendations and accompany policy implementation. IRI Brazil is also participating in weekly meetings of the Parliamentary Front for the Defense of Indigenous Peoples and the Environment, with various members of the House of Representatives. IRI Brazil also participated in the opening ceremony of the work of the Environmentalist Parliamentary Front (FPA) of the House of Representatives. The meeting was attended by important authorities of the Federal Government, and parliamentarians committed to the defense of socio-environmental governance and leaders of the environmental movement.

IRI Brazil participates in Acampamento Terra Livre, the largest mobilization of indigenous peoples in the country

IRI Brazil recently participated in the Acampamento Terra Livre, supporting the mobilization and promotion of the movement's proposals, in particular around the creation of new indigenous lands and the protection of existing lands. Acampamento Terra Livre is a critical platform for IRI Brazil to demonstrate solidarity and partnership between religious leaders and faith-based organizations and the country's indigenous peoples.

IRI Brazil adds CEMADEN and INPE to Advisory Council

IRI Brazil has been working with the Center for Monitoring and Alert of Natural Disasters (CEMADEN) and the Space Research Institute (INPE) to provide religious leaders with in-person visits and trainings on forests and climate change. Plans to train hundreds of additional religious

leaders in 2023 have been arranged, and both CEMADEN and INPE have agreed to become official members of the IRI Brazil Advisory Council.

COLOMBIA

IRI Colombia carries out trainings, capacity building with local chapters

IRI Colombia has initiated its strategy for the training of religious leaders on forest issues in 2023. The goal is to continue to build the capacity of religious leaders and other members of the urban and rural IRI Colombia chapters and equip them with the necessary knowledge to raise awareness about the seriousness of deforestation and its effects on climate change, the rights of indigenous peoples and the urgency of halting the loss of tropical forests. In the first quarter of 2023, IRI Colombia carried out trainings in eight municipalities of Caquetá and Guaviare, working with 24 local chapters (urban and rural) of these two departments. During the workshops, IRI Colombia trained 325 religious leaders on theology of creation and indigenous spiritualities, deforestation and climate change. The trainings were attended by religious, social and environmental leaders, presidents of community action boards, educators, indigenous authorities and political leaders who make up the 24 local chapters. They carried out a mapping exercise to recognise the impact of climate change on their territories and reflect on possible solutions for mitigation and adaptation, including entry points for political advocacy. IRI Colombia also recently held a four-day training and installation event with three territorial liaisons who will serve as dedicated focal points for IRI Colombia work in priority regions.

IRI Colombia continues to advocate for commitments to protect forests and the rights of indigenous peoples in the National Development Plan, 2022-2026

IRI-Colombia continues its work to influence the National Development Plan, 2022-2026 and to secure commitments to protect the Amazon. Since last year, IRI Colombia has been working to influence the plan through the alliances "Escucha la Amazonia" and others, with the aim of ensuring that policies and programs for the protection of the Colombian Amazon and the control of deforestation are included in the planning instrument. Once President Petro submitted the National Development Plan for approval in early February, IRI Colombia and the alliance "The Voice of the Amazon in the PND 2022-2026" studied the document and formulated a series of observations that were delivered to several senators and representatives to the Chamber of Deputies, to be included during the process of approval of the document in Congress. IRI Colombia also developed a communications strategy to promote the inclusion of forest commitments in the plan, including placing opinion columns, newspaper articles and radio interviews.

IRI Colombia plans to install six new local chapters in Caquetá and Putumayo

Building on their network of local chapters in regions of the country where forests face the greatest threats, IRI Colombia has plans to launch six new local chapters in Caquetá and

Putumayo. The program has held meetings with representatives of the municipal government (including the mayors) and coordinators of Community Action Boards to lay the groundwork for launch of the chapters by the end of the summer. Once launched, the IRI Colombia network will be up to 46 chapters in the Amazonian municipalities with the highest deforestation rates.

IRI Colombia advances work with the private sector, Bogota Chamber of Commerce

Since last year, IRI Colombia has been approaching the business sector with the aim of consolidating a working agenda. In February and March, IRI Colombia met with the Bogota Chamber of Commerce to invite the entity to join as an ally to raise awareness throughout the business and commercial sector about the protection of forests and the rights of indigenous peoples, and to explore the creation of an alliance with this institution, aimed at carrying out activities that contribute to stopping deforestation and restoring the Amazon. The Bogota Chamber of Commerce has since appointed a representative of the entity to build a joint work plan with IRI Colombia, which will address two activities: the first, a meeting with companies whose economic activity is related to livestock, nurseries or agriculture, with the aim of addressing the risks of deforestation and the positive impact that these organisations can generate on the environment if they commit to forest protection; the second, an exchange of experiences on good livestock farming practices, would involve companies that are part of the Bogotá Chamber of Commerce, members of local IRI chapters and livestock farmers from the Amazon region.

IRI Colombia develops a billboard awareness campaign on halting deforestation

Two billboards installed by IRI Colombia at Gustavo Artunduaga Paredes Airport in Florencia (Caquetá) feature a striking image of a deforested area of land and another of a forest fire. "The Amazon rainforest is dying, help us save it", say the billboards. The billboards are part of IRI Colombia's communications strategy and seek to raise awareness of the seriousness of deforestation and the urgency of halting forest loss in this region. Late last year, IRI Colombia also installed two billboards at the Jorge Enrique González Airport in San José del Guaviare and another three in strategic locations in the city. This year, IRI Colombia intends to install similar billboards in the most important airports of the four departments where it is present through its local chapters.

IRI Colombia prepares a new pedagogical resource

IRI Colombia has formed a working group with theologians from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana to prepare the booklet, "Lecciones bíblicas ambientales" (or Environmental Bible Lessons). This pedagogical resource seeks to promote and support pastoral activities by the religious leaders that make up the IRI Colombia local chapters, to make the deforestation crisis visible and motivate faith communities to act to defend and protect the Amazon as a way to fulfil the mandate to restore creation. The booklet is part of the IRI Colombia pedagogical

strategy, which seeks to identify and implement appropriate forms of pastoral action to promote change in defense of the forests and advocacy for their restoration.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

IRI DRC Advisory Council meets to set strategy for 2023

The IRI DRC Advisory Council met in January to establish a plan of action and activities for 2023, a year when the country will hold general elections and the program will endeavor to make the protection and restoration of DRC's forests a priority topic for candidates for office. A briefing was provided on the context of deforestation in the DRC, the objectives of the work plan, the various forms of proposed intervention, the strategies of actions, the targets and the means of the IRI DRC team. Focused broadly on education and awareness raising, on-the-ground mobilisation and advocacy, the strategy is based on four pillars of work: (i) working with religious denominations present in the 14 forest provinces; working on two strategic fronts with religious denominations and national and international organisations to fight deforestation in the DRC; (iii) reinforcing strategic communication on forests through religious networks and channels; and (iv) advocating for laws, policies and legislation that reverse the deforestation trend.

IRI DRC advances on strategy with parliamentarians to protect forests

Committed to reforms for the protection of forests and the rights of local communities and indigenous pygmy peoples, IRI DRC met with the GTCRR (Renewed REDD Climate Working Group) advocacy team in their office on January 26, 2023 to set up a parliamentary advocacy strategy. At the end of the meeting, the parties agreed to pursue advocacy in two priority sectors: (i) territorial planning and (ii) land tenure. Three actions were identified as part of the advocacy strategy, including the production of reference documents, a parliamentary meeting with the members of the Administrative and Legal Policy Commission, the members of the Bureau of the Upper House (Parliament) and the Lower House (Senate), and finally a follow-up at the level of the Constitutional Court.

IRI DRC holds two-day high-level briefings for the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC) and the Episcopal Conference of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (CENCO)

IRI recently held high-level briefing events to mainstream the program and the protection of forests in the two largest religious organizations in the country -- the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC) and the Episcopal Conference of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (CENCO). The 2-day briefing for ECC included the National President of ECC, who made a commitment to be strongly involved in execution of the IRI DRC action plan and set up an ad hoc working group to integrate IRI DRC activities into the priorities of the different ECC departments, a plan that will be developed and finalized in the coming weeks. The ECC briefing received significant media coverage, including segments on national television and radio. The 2-day briefing that followed for CENCO was also successful at raising awareness about the program and creating pathways

in the organization to strengthen commitments to protect forests. CENCO committed to setting up a committee and three sub-commissions designed to integrate the priority actions of IRI DRC into the action plans of all the 12 Episcopal Commissions and the services attached to CENCO.

IRI DRC participates in civil society conference of forest partners, initiates campaign

National Facilitator of the IRI DRC program, Matthieu Yela Bonketo, was invited to present at and participate in a Norway-hosted workshop of civil society organizations working on forests and the rights of indigenous peoples in the country. The IRI DRC work plan was presented and a proposal made by the program to initiate a campaign with like-minded civil society groups to help make the protection and reforestation of DRC's forests a priority issue in the upcoming presidential elections.

IRI DRC participates in meeting with the Presidency of the country

In March, IRI DRC participated in a preparatory session and high-level meeting organised at the Presidency of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The meeting was chaired by the Senior Advisor to the President of the DRC in charge of the environment. An evaluation of the DRC's participation in COP27 of the UNFCCC in Egypt and COP15 of the CBD was provided, and there was a discussion on the NDCs and the state of play of various reforms being supported by CAFI. The Inter-Donor Group on Environment and Climate (GIBEC) briefed participants about the existing financing possibilities for the DRC. Discussions will continue in a formal setting that will be set up for high-level exchanges at the Presidency of the Republic, which will include IRI DRC.

IRI DRC contributes to workshop on NDCs, advocates for forests

In April, IRI DRC participated in a validation workshop of DRC's NDC roadmap. The workshop was organised by the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development with the support of UNDP. The NDC roadmap was adopted to be implemented in the coming weeks and includes actions related to governance, adaptation to climate change, mitigation of the effects of climate change, monitoring, reporting and verification of the impact of actions to fight climate change and, finally, resource mobilisation for implementation of the roadmap. IRI DRC is also supporting a project entitled "Capacity building of civil society, religious denominations and traditional leaders for an ambitious and coherent NDC in the Democratic Republic of Congo" which aims at monitoring the NDC roadmap and involving these actors in its implementation.

INDONESIA

IRI Indonesia meets Vice Minister of Environment and Forestry, secures involvement in FOLU

In January, IRI Indonesia met with the Vice Minister of Environment and Forestry (MEF) and his staff to introduce the program and discuss joint actions on forest protection. As a result of the meeting, IRI Indonesia has been invited to be involved in work on forestry and other land use (FOLU), a primary MEF program to meet the country's Nationally Determined Contributions.

forestry and other land use accounts for 60% of Indonesia's NDC component. IRI Indonesia will be invited to all socialization and FOLU programs so that the government can involve religious leaders to support this ambitious program. At the meeting, IRI Indonesia also presented the religious guidebooks and preaching books to the Vice Minister.

IRI Indonesia launches videos supporting resource guides and religious teaching books on forests developed for each of the country's Religious Councils

Last year, IRI Indonesia launched a series of resource guides and religious teaching books on forests for each of the six Religious Councils in the country. The goal was to provide religious leaders and the Religious Council networks of each faith with practical tools to incorporate the moral and spiritual basis for protecting forests and the rights of indigenous peoples into their teaching. To enhance the reach and dissemination of these tools, IRI Indonesia recently launched a series of videos based on these guidebooks, with prominent religious leaders explaining tools and promoting their uptake. The program has engaged in a concerted outreach campaign through social media to promote the videos and the teaching guides. The videos can be found [here](#).

IRI Indonesia holds workshop, webinar on forests and the rights of indigenous peoples

IRI Indonesia recently held a workshop to discuss existing policies on the rights of indigenous peoples and a road map for how to advocate for more progressive policies in the future. The event was used as an opportunity to present the IRI Indonesia vision, mission and priority activities and programs to NGOs and various partners working in the regions where IRI Indonesia has provincial chapters. Additionally, a webinar was held between IRI Indonesia, Ecomasjid, Greenpeace and Borneo Nature Foundation on forests, where a presentation was again given on the IRI Indonesia program. A link to the webinar can be found [here](#).

IRI Indonesia collaborates with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry on interfaith dialogue

IRI Indonesia is focusing on a strategy to mainstream the program and the forests agenda in the eight official Religious Councils in the country. The program recently joined with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry for an interfaith dialogue on building synergies and partnerships to realize sustainable waste management, an event that was used to sensitize key religious leaders and networks to the IRI Indonesia mission.

PERU

IRI Peru advocacy succeeds in blocking dangerous bills in Congress

IRI Peru recently succeeded in having the dangerous Anti-Amazonian Bill rejected by the Plenary of Congress. Congress put on the agenda a bill that eliminated the competences of the national authorities, SERFOR, MINAM, to rule on the use of Amazonian territories. This could

lead to an avalanche of permits by countless regional and local authorities. This bill was rejected by the full congress thanks to the advocacy developed by IRI Peru and other organisations. Also, in January, IRI Peru prompted the Bishops of the Amazon to issue a statement calling for respect for the rights of indigenous peoples in isolation and initial contact. In the statement, the Bishops of the Amazon reject Bill No. 3518/2022, which was being debated in Congress and which represented a threat to indigenous peoples in isolation and initial contact (PIACI), as it aims to "transfer powers to regional governments without evaluating the legal framework and the socio-political context". The bishops from 8 Amazonian jurisdictions criticised the attempt to decentralise the function of recognising PIACI and the categorisation of reserves and demanded that legislative proposals include the participation and consultation of indigenous peoples and the organisations that represent them.

IRI Peru delivers trainings and workshops to religious leaders in local chapters

IRI Peru initiated its strategy for the training of religious leaders on forest issues in 2023. The goal is to continue to build the capacity of religious leaders of the IRI Peru chapters and equip them with the necessary knowledge to raise awareness about the seriousness of deforestation and its effects on climate change, the rights of indigenous peoples and the urgency of halting the loss of tropical forests. So far in 2023, IRI Peru has trained more than 300 religious leaders from major faith communities in the regions and have strengthened their knowledge about forests and ecosystem services, the sacredness of nature, and tools for advocacy with decision makers on forests.

IRI Peru advances agreements and MOUs with various Ministries defining collaborative work on forests and the rights of indigenous peoples

IRI Peru has created and signed agreements with executive authorities to ensure the protection of forests and the security of forest defenders. An MOU is already in place between IRI Peru and the Ministry of Environment, and a proposal has been shared regarding a work plan for the implementation of the second year of the agreement. High-level meetings have also been held with authorities in the Ministry of Justice (MINJUS) and the National Forest and Wild Fauna Service (SERFOR) and IRI Peru is now in the final stages of signing inter-institutional cooperation agreements that focus on activities to stop deforestation and promote an agenda for healthy forests and the defence of forest defenders.

IRI Peru continues to advance, expand Parliamentary Group for a Healthy Amazon

IRI Peru continues to manage the Parliamentary Group for a Healthy Amazon, a group of policymakers committed to advancing laws and legislation that promote the protection and restoration of Peru's forests. Additional meetings have been held with congressmen Flor Pablo and Susel Paredes, prompting them to join the group which, in recent months, has been decisive in some sessions of Congress to prevent measures that affect forests. IRI Peru is in the process of organising a meeting of Parliamentary Group to discuss a congressional agenda for forests.

IRI Peru chapters succeed in creating Environmental Commissions

Two IRI Peru chapters have been successful in creating Environmental Commissions in Imaza and Quillabamba, two rural Amazonian municipalities. Environmental Commissions issue opinions on measures taken by the municipalities on environmental issues, including decisions affecting forests. The commissions are currently developing their work plans, with IRI Peru chapters accompanying the process.

IRI Peru presents concern for the situation of the forests in meeting of the Interreligious Council with the President of the Republic

On Monday 16 January, religious leaders of the Interreligious Council of Peru presented to President Dina Boluarte their concern for the political crisis that has been occurring in the country. Laura Vargas, Coordinator of IRI Peru, read out the letter prepared by the religious leaders in which they ask to stop the violence, to "walk in forgiveness", to bring forward elections, to create bridges for listening and to promote justice. IRI Peru was presented as a platform for protecting forests and the rights of indigenous peoples, and for inter-religious solidarity and action on issues affecting people of the country.

IRI Peru meets with GCF-Peru to drive initiatives through 2023

Following the results of the Governors' Climate and Forest Task Force meeting, IRI Peru held a meeting with Fabiola Muñoz, coordinator of GCF-Peru and the Coalition for Sustainable Production. The proposal is to implement jointly and with the support of the Amazon Regional Commonwealth - which brings together the Amazonian governors - monitoring and action platforms for a healthy Amazon. Among the prioritised lines of work are the consolidation of indigenous titling and security, climate resilience, spaces for dialogue for peace and the strengthening of Amazonian identity.