

INTERFAITH RAINFOREST INITIATIVE

Updates - August 2023

IRI ISSUES CALL TO ACTION, HOLDS EVENT AT THE AMAZON SUMMIT

IRI Brazil, IRI Colombia, and IRI Peru have reaffirmed their commitment to Amazon protection and issued a call to action directed at Amazonian country presidents attending the August 8-9 Amazon Summit in Belém do Pará. Their appeal urged governments to take measures to combat deforestation, safeguard indigenous land rights, address environmental crimes and violence, counter drug trafficking, and invest in sustainable development projects. This declaration was made during the “Religions in Action for a Sustainable Amazon” side event on August 6 as part of the “Amazon Dialogues” framework established by the Brazilian government. The event brought together religious leaders, indigenous organization representatives, and Advisory Council members from the three IRI country programs. Key government officials, including Brazil’s Minister of the Environment, Marina Silva; Peru’s Minister of Environment, Albina Ruiz Rios; and Brazil’s Minister of Indigenous Peoples, Sonia Guajajara, pledged support for IRI’s call to action. Additionally, the three IRI country programs conducted a comprehensive communication campaign highlighting Amazon-related issues and IRI’s work through publications, a video, infographics, and a dedicated magazine. Access and download the IRI call to action in English ([here](#)), Spanish ([here](#)) and Portuguese ([here](#)).

IRI CONVENES PLENARY SESSION AT THE 2023 PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD’S RELIGIONS

On August 16th, IRI facilitated a high-level dialogue with indigenous leaders from across the Amazon Basin at the 2023 Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago, USA. The event, “An Urgent Call to Protect the Amazon: An Interfaith Rainforest Initiative Dialogue with Indigenous Peoples”, was delivered as a plenary session for the more than 7,000 religious leaders gathered at the Parliament. The plenary, which aimed to raise the voices of indigenous peoples in their fight for protection of the Amazon and profile IRI as a shared platform for religious leaders to work shoulder to shoulder with indigenous peoples to protect forests and the rights of forest guardians, concluded with An Urgent Call to Action to Protect the Amazon, which you can read [here](#). Watch the entire event [here](#). IRI was also featured during the Environment Plenary and Closing Session of the 2023 Parliament.

BRAZIL

IRI BRAZIL PUBLISHES EDITORIAL FOR THE AMAZON SUMMIT

IRI Brazil coordinated the preparation and placement of an editorial signed by an indigenous leader (Kleber Karipuna, APIB), a scientist (Carlos Nobre, Scientific Panel of the Amazon) and a religious leader (Pastor Romi Bencke, CONIC) to issue key messages from IRI around the Amazon Summit. The editorial read, in part, “The importance of this event is clear, as is the responsibility of the governments that will be there...our countries must tell themselves and the world what they are going to do with the largest and richest forest on the planet. They must move away from populist talk and engage in a high-level dialogue with the depth needed

to respond to the climate crisis.” The editorial was published on Brazil’s main news portal, UOL, on the opening day of the Presidential segment of the Summit. The portal has 120 million followers. Read the article [here](#).

IRI BRAZIL PARTICIPATES IN LAUNCH OF UN-BRAZIL FUND FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMAZON

IRI Brazil participated in the launch of UN-Brazil Fund for the Sustainable Development of the Amazon, in the city of Santarém, Pará, which aims to promote sustainable economic alternatives for the benefit of the region’s populations. The Fund is the result of a UN partnership with the Interstate Consortium of the Legal Amazon and the federal government. The event was attended by the UN’s Deputy Secretary-General, Amina J. Mohammed, the Minister for Regional Development, Waldez Góes, governors of Amazonian states, representatives of international organizations, civil society and the private sector. On the occasion, the national facilitator of IRI Brazil had the opportunity to talk directly with Amina Mohammed, presenting a brief summary of IRI Brazil’s work. With some members of her team, IRI Brazil initiated a discussion on some joint awareness-raising actions.

IRI BRAZIL PARTICIPATES IN PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD’S RELIGIONS, SHOWCASES AMAZONIA VIVA

IRI Brazil screened the virtual reality film “Amazônia Viva” during the four days of the Parliament of the World’s Religions. The IRI Brazil team reached a direct audience of more than 500 people. Several important contacts were made after the screenings and new partnerships are now being negotiated with potential new donors and organizations interested in helping to spread the message of preserving the Amazon and defending the rights of indigenous peoples.

IRI BRAZIL HOLDS BILATERAL MEETINGS IN CHICAGO AND NEW YORK

Between August 18th and 23rd, the IRI Brazil team held the following meetings to present the work developed in the country and to prospect partnership possibilities at the Chicago Museum of Natural History, the Department of Latin American Studies at Columbia University, the office of the United Nations Deputy Secretary General, Woods & Wayside International Inc and People & Plants International.

IRI BRAZIL MOBILIZES PARTNERSHIPS TO LAUNCH MATO GROSSO CHAPTER

From August 24 to 28, meetings were conducted in Cuiabá, the capital of Mato Grosso state, involving 50 Catholic, Evangelical, and African religious leaders. The primary objective was to introduce IRI Brazil and encourage them to join the forthcoming IRI state chapter in the city. IRI Brazil also took part in the 35th Pastoral Assembly of the Western Section 2 of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB). During this event, the film “Amazônia Viva” was screened for 70 participants, followed by a presentation on IRI Brazil. Father Dário Bossi, an advisor to CNBB’s Episcopal Commission for Socio-Transformative Action, used the film to foster a discussion on faith and the environment. The outcome was highly positive, garnering support for the establishment of the IRI state chapter.

IRI BRAZIL ENGAGES IN PUBLIC ADVOCACY AROUND BILL THAT THREATENS INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

IRI Brazil engaged in public advocacy efforts targeting Senators who are part of the Senate Agriculture Committee (CRA) to dissuade them from supporting Bill 2903/2023, which threatens the demarcation rights of Indigenous Peoples. The initiative involved sending open letters endorsed by religious leaders and organizations, along with individual appeals via social media to each Senator. Despite these efforts, the outcome was not favorable. The CRA is predominantly composed of representatives from the agricultural sector, particularly those who are staunchly opposed to indigenous rights.

IRI BRAZIL ADVANCES AWARENESS-RAISING CAMPAIGN, EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS IN AMAZONIAN STATES

IRI Brazil has undertaken an initiative to raise awareness and mobilize religious leaders in the Amazon regarding the critical issue of reducing air pollution caused by forest fires and deforestation. To facilitate this effort, IRI Brazil have developed a comprehensive set of orientation guides and an online card kit that highlights the severity of the situation in each of the 9 states within the Legal Amazon. These materials have been tailored to suit various religious contexts and are structured into four parts: religious foundations, diagnosis of the problem, practical guidelines for preventive measures, and a list of actions that governments should take. The campaign's launch is scheduled as part of IRI's commemorative activities for Amazon Day, observed on September 5th. The communications materials can be found [here](#).

COLOMBIA

IRI COLOMBIA SECURES COMMITMENTS TO PROTECT THE AMAZON FROM CANDIDATES FOR GOVERNOR IN CAQUETÁ, GUAVIARE AND PUTUMAYO

IRI Colombia advanced its mission of advocating for forest protection and the rights of indigenous peoples in the lead-up to Colombia's regional elections on October 23. IRI Colombia conducted a comprehensive advocacy campaign, holding debates with gubernatorial candidates in Caquetá, Guaviare, and Putumayo departments. The three debates served as a platform for candidates to present their environmental proposals and encouraged them to commit, through a programmatic agreement, to promoting policies and programs for the restoration and preservation of the Amazon ecosystem once elected. The debates were broadcast on regional television and radio stations and reached nearly 36,000 people, both in-person and through social networks and media. Candidates publicly pledged their support for Amazon protection, committing to prioritize it ethically and politically, integrate conservation strategies into departmental development plans, and ensure the rights and well-being of indigenous peoples and Amazon communities.

IRI COLOMBIA DELIVERS ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN, PUBLIC DEBATES ON FORESTS WITH MAYORAL CANDIDATES IN 10 AMAZON MUNICIPALITIES

During August, IRI Colombia organized 10 debates with mayoral candidates in priority municipalities in Caquetá, Guaviare, and Putumayo, with over 19,000 people attending and viewing the events through in-person and online engagement. These debates, conducted with the support of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM-Colombia), allowed 43 mayoral candidates to present their government proposals on forests to the public. Candidates put forth diverse environmental and community-focused plans, such as creating an environmental tax for forest preservation, transitioning to sustainable cattle ranching, and implementing waste management and recycling programs. There was a recurring call for better coordination between local, regional, and national institutions, as well as international support. As a result, 37 mayoral candidates signed IRI Colombia's programmatic commitment statement and agreement, committing to prioritize Amazon forest protection, develop projects for ecosystem restoration and conservation, and uphold the rights of local communities, emphasizing equity and environmental justice. These debates align with IRI Colombia's advocacy strategy to foster laws, programs, and policies that safeguard forests, combat deforestation, address biodiversity loss, mitigate climate change, and defend the rights of indigenous, peasant, and Afro-descendant communities residing in these areas.

IRI COLOMBIA PUBLISHES EDITORIAL FOR AMAZON SUMMIT

IRI Colombia coordinated the preparation and publication of an editorial "A New Hope opens for the Amazon" signed by Bishop Francisco Duque Gómez, President, Interreligious Council of Colombia; Dr. Germán Poveda, Professor of the National University; Oswaldo Muca Castizo, Coordinator General, Association of Indigenous Authorities of Querari (OPIAC), in support of the Amazon Summit. The editorial read, in part, "The leaders who sign this call do so from different perspectives but united by a common purpose. From the scientific perspective we understand that deforestation is one of the causes of climate change. From the spiritual perspective we recognize that restoring the Common Home is protecting the home of future generations. From the perspective of environmental defenders we recognize that ending violence against indigenous peoples is a condition for halting the loss of the Amazon rainforest. But we all understand that the time to act decisively for the Amazon is now." The editorial was published in *El Espectador*, one of the main newspapers in Colombia. [Read the editorial here.](#)

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

IRI DRC ADVANCES NATIONAL ADVOCACY ON KEY LEGISLATIVE REFORMS TO PROTECT FORESTS

IRI DRC met with a team of experts specializing in land-use planning, land tenure, and agricultural reform on August 27, 2023, at the IRI DRC office to align the advocacy roadmap developed in March 2023 and devise new strategies to enhance advocacy efforts, particularly by involving religious leaders. In accordance with the guidance from the IRI DRC Advisory Council co-presidency, the experts drafted a memorandum and established a strategy to

apply pressure on the National Assembly and Senate offices during the parliamentary recess in September. This recess is significant as it is the final one for this legislative term in the country, highlighting the urgency of advancing the reform process in Parliament.

IRI DRC LAUNCHES NEW CHAPTER IN MANIEMA

IRI Maniema was launched on August 10, 2023 in Kindu, capital of Maniema province. It was preceded by a training session held from August 8 to 9. The training program included (1) presentation of IRI DRC and its modus operandi, (2) the context of IRI DRC's work, (3) its approaches, (4) the theology of creation, and (5) opportunities for IRI DRC in Maniema. The training was attended by 20 religious leaders representing CENCO, ECC, Salvation Army, COMICO, UEIC, Eglise de Réveil au Congo, Eglise indépendante du Congo, provincial environmental coordination, provincial agricultural division, GTCR-R, REPALEF, CFLEDD and the customary authority. The IRI Maniema inauguration ceremony was presided over by the provincial governor of Maniema, in the presence of the mayor of Kindu and two mayors of the city of Kindu. IRI Maniema's Advisory Council and supervisory team were constituted as follows: the Council is co-chaired by the ECC and CENCO, with the 20 representatives listed above.

IRI NORTH KIVU HOLDS ADVICORY COUNCIL MEETING

IRI North Kivu held an Advisory Council meeting at the Church of Christ (ECC) in North Kivu. Attendees included Advisory Council members and the National Facilitator of IRI DRC. During the meeting, participants received updates on activities conducted by technicians and religious institutions in the regions, and the Advisory Council members also approved a pastoral and environmental plan that was elaborated with the support of dedicated technicians. The meeting served as a platform for discussing and validating important work plans for the IRI North Kivu chapter, including on advocacy for policies that protect forests and the rights of forest communities.

IRI NORTH KIVU ADVOCATES FOR THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PYGMY PEOPLES

On August 23, IRI North Kivu, held an event in support of the Pygmy indigenous peoples in North Kivu on the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The objective of the intervention was to enhance advocacy efforts for the legal recognition of Pygmy indigenous communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in alignment with law n°22/030, which promotes and protects the rights of Pygmy indigenous peoples in the country. The event culminated in a press conference hosted by the IRI DRC team, underscoring their commitment to advancing the rights and recognition of the Pygmy indigenous population.

IRI NORTH KIVU ADVOCATES FOR GREEN WALL AT PROVINCIAL OFFICE FOR ENVIRONMENT

On August 4, 2023, the IRI North Kivu team conducted a visit to the Provincial Office for Environment. During the meeting, they discussed several key projects, including the construction of a Green Wall between Nyiragongo Volcano and Goma city, the establishment of a green belt between Lake Kivu and Goma city, and the "every plot a tree" campaign.

IRI NORTH KIVU SUPPORTS TRAINING OF TRAINERS WORKSHOP ON FOREST PROTECTION

From August 17 to 21, the Church of Christ (ECC) organised a training of trainers event for its member communities in North-Kivu. The event was a 4-day training workshop, to train trainers on environmental protection in the context of “care for creation”. IRI DRC took part through Mr. Espoir Kyalemaninwa Masumbuko, the supervisor of the IRI North Kivu chapter.

IRI NORTH KIVU ADVANCES COLLABORATION WITH RELIGIOUS UNIVERSITIES

On August 31, 2023, the IRI North Kivu supervision team held a meeting with professors from religious universities, including the Université Libre des Pays des Grands Lacs and the Université Catholique la Sapiencia. The purpose of the meeting was to map green and vacant spaces within church premises, plan for the publication of research results conducted by scientists, provide environmental education to various segments of society, and encourage religious leaders to participate in the scientific events hosted by these universities. This collaborative effort aims to enhance forest awareness and engagement within the community, facilitated through partnerships with religious educational institutions.

INDONESIA

IRI INDONESIA HOLDS DISCUSSION WITH UNDP INDONESIA AND TKN PSL REGARDING COLLABORATION ON MOOC AND WMTC IN THE SENTUL RIVER AREA

IRI Indonesia convened a significant discussion with key partners, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and TKN-PSL, regarding collaborative efforts to create Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) modules and establish a Water Management Training Center (WMTC) in the Sentul river area. This meeting, held in Cipambuan Village, Sentul, Bogor, was aimed at formulating concrete plans and steps to develop educational resources addressing environmental issues and forest protection, particularly in the Sentul River region. During the meeting, participants, including IRI Indonesia's national facilitator, representatives from UNDP, and TKN-PSL, identified essential elements to incorporate into the MOOC and WMTC modules. Discussions centered on environmental sustainability and the role of religion in addressing challenges and proposing solutions. The collaboration aims to produce educational materials that will contribute to environmental sustainability in the Sentul River area and beyond.

IRI INDONESIA HOLDS MEETING WITH ECOLIVING, IBS, AND IPB REGARDING COMMUNITY SERVICE RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF GREEN ENTERPRIZES, FOOD FORESTS

IRI Indonesia, in collaboration with Ecoliving, Indonesia Banking School (IBS), Bogor Agricultural University (IPB), and local village authorities, organized an event in Cipambuan Village, Bogor, focusing on community service related to the development of Green Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) and Food Forests. The initiative aimed to serve the community by fostering sustainable MSMEs and preserving the local ecosystem through the establishment of a Food Forest. Attendees included local community members

and village stakeholders who actively participated in discussions and formulated concrete steps for sustainable MSMEs and Food Forest implementation. Representatives from IRI Indonesia, Ecoliving, IBS, and IPB shared insights and expertise on sustainable practices, emphasizing community involvement in environmental management and eco-friendly business development. This event served as a platform for inspiring and taking concrete actions in support of environmental sustainability in the Sentul River area.

IRI INDONESIA HOLDS MEETING WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES OF KALIMANTAN FOREST CONSERVATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF THE NEW CAPITAL CITY OF INDONESIA

IRI Indonesia organized an event in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan, where eight religious leaders from various parts of Indonesia engaged in dialogue with ten representatives of indigenous communities from Paser, Sepaku, and Berau. The central theme of the discussion was the religious approach to forest and environmental conservation within the context of IRI Indonesia. The dialogue resulted in strong support from indigenous community leaders for inclusive and sustainable environmental conservation measures in Kalimantan, emphasizing its effectiveness in raising awareness and protecting the region's forests. The event underscored the significance of interfaith cooperation in preserving the Kalimantan ecosystem, and the endorsement of this approach by IRI Indonesia's religious leaders, as well as the indigenous leaders, represents a crucial step towards improved forest protection and sustainability, potentially becoming a vital element in ongoing conservation efforts for a healthier environment in Kalimantan.

IRI INDONESIA HOLDS MEETING WITH THE DEPUTY DIRECTORS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES SECTORS OF THE NEW CAPITAL CITY OF INDONESIA

In this program activity, IRI Indonesia was represented by 8 religious leaders and the national facilitator. On the other side, the Deputy of Natural Resources of the New Capital City of Indonesia (IKN) was represented by Myrna A. Safitri, S.H., M.Si., Ph.D., along with two representatives from the MANKA association. The discussions resulted in a deeper understanding of IRI Indonesia's vision and mission in the context of the local government. Key points discussed included the urgency of a religious approach in supporting local communities in preserving forests and the environment, as well as the challenges faced by indigenous communities. The activity marks an important initial step in building closer collaboration between IRI Indonesia, the government, and local communities for environmental conservation.

IRI INDONESIA SUPPORTS ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION CAMP ATTENDED BY SCHOOLS IN THE NEW CAPITAL CITY OF INDONESIA (IKN)

IRI Indonesia supported an Environmental Conservation Camp in the New Capital of Indonesia (IKN) by conducting a seminar on "Religious Approaches to Environmental Conservation" on August 18, 2023, at the Bukit Bengkirai Conservation Campsite. Over 100 students from various IKN schools attended, gaining insights into environmental issues and the role of religion in nature preservation. The camp, organized by MANKA ("Conservation Camps for Nature Lovers"),

featured eight religious leaders and the IRI Indonesia national facilitator who shared the importance of religious approaches to environmental conservation. The seminar created an inspiring atmosphere, deepening the students' understanding of the link between religion and environmental protection and motivating them to actively participate in nature conservation.

PERU

IRI PERU ADVISORY COUNCIL EVALUATES BILLS THAT IMPACT RAINFORESTS AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

On August 31, IRI Peru's Advisory Council conducted an assessment of the challenging situation confronting the Amazonian forests and communities, primarily due to legislative bills put forth by lawmakers and interest groups prioritizing their specific agendas. César Gamboa, Executive Director of the NGO Derecho, Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (DAR), examined the initiatives, which have the potential to undermine environmental management in Peru under the guise of economic revitalization. Following an extensive discussion, IRI Peru identified collaborative and individual strategies to enhance the visibility of rainforest protection and indigenous rights issues in the country. IRI Peru reaffirmed its commitment to work alongside its partners to confront these challenges arising from the political and economic agendas during this critical period.

IRI PERU PUBLISHES OPINION PIECE ON THE AMAZON SUMMIT IN LA REPUBLICA

On August 4, the newspaper La República published an opinion column signed by three members of the IRI Peru Advisory Council: Fabiola Muñoz, former Minister of Environment and Agricultural Development and Irrigation; Monsignor Alfredo Vizcarra, Bishop of Jaén; and Julio Cusurichi, director of the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest (AIDSEP). The text, on the occasion of the Amazon Summit, addresses the crucial moment that forests and indigenous peoples are going through. For this reason, it makes an urgent appeal to the Amazonian governments. It reads, in part: "The Amazon is past, present and future. It is the presence of the divine and an opportunity for peace, harmony, respect and sustainable development. The three signatories of this article are members of the IRI Peru Advisory Council, but we come from different realities: spiritual, indigenous and public service. In each of these spaces, our action is required." Read the editorial [here](#).

IRI PERU MEETS WITH INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATION OF PUTUMAYO IN THE FACE OF THREATS

IRI Peru met with Arlen Ribeira, president of the Federation of Native Border Communities of Putumayo (Feconafropu), to learn about the situation faced by the indigenous populations in this area bordering Colombia due to criminal activities, mainly drug trafficking and illegal mining. IRI Peru was able to arrange an appointment with the director of Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice, as well as to liaise with the National Service of Natural Areas Protected by the State (Sernanp), to discuss the protection of seven areas that are under threat.

IRI PERU PROMOTES DEFENSE OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY AFFECTED BY ILLEGAL MINING

IRI Peru and its Advisory Council visited the home of Mrs. Yésica Díaz in the community of Paucarsito (Puerto Inca, Huánuco). They confirmed that the indigenous defender has been suffering aggressions and threats from illegal miners and her own community. IRI Peru then met with the director of Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice and obtained the declaration of Ms. Díaz as a defender under threat within the Protection Mechanism for Defenders. IRI Peru also coordinated with other institutions to make her case visible in the media and to put on the national agenda a story that is all too common throughout the Amazon.

IRI PERU PARTICIPATES IN CONGRESS SESSION ON NATURAL PROTECTED AREAS

IRI Peru was invited by Peruvian congressmen associated with the Amazonian Parliament (Parlamaz) and the ICCF Peru - Caucus, a non-profit organization based in Washington, to participate in a “Multiparty Dialogue Table on Effective Management of Protected Natural Areas (PNAs).” The event aimed to address the challenges confronting national PNAs and enhance strategies for their efficient administration. It also provided a platform to discuss legislative proposals that might weaken the National System of PNAs and establish connections with Peruvian legislators affiliated with Parlamaz, who had participated in the Amazon Summit. The overarching goal was to advance an agenda focused on forest conservation and the welfare of Amazonian communities.

IRI QUILLABAMBA CONTRIBUTES TO ENVIRONMENTAL PLAN OF PROVINCIAL MUNICIPALITY

The Municipal Environmental Commission of the Province of Quillabamba, which includes members from the IRI Quillabamba chapter, has approved an environmental defense action plan for their territory. The plan integrates input from IRI Quillabamba and focuses on various aspects of forest protection, including education. It outlines the development of an awareness-raising initiative targeting the entire population to encourage forest conservation across all sectors. The plan entails training environmental promoters within educational institutions, with a specific emphasis on highlighting the significant contributions of forests to the planet’s well-being. Additionally, the plan underscores the importance of shifting our perspective on our relationship with nature, viewing it not merely as resources for human use but as valuable, living entities with intrinsic worth and an ongoing connection with humanity.