

INTERFAITH RAINFOREST INITIATIVE PLENARY SESSION AT 2023 PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

*A CALL FROM INDIGENOUS LEADERS FOR
PROTECTION OF THE AMAZON AND ITS PEOPLE*



On August 16th, the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (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](#).

WATCH THE EVENT HERE

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION



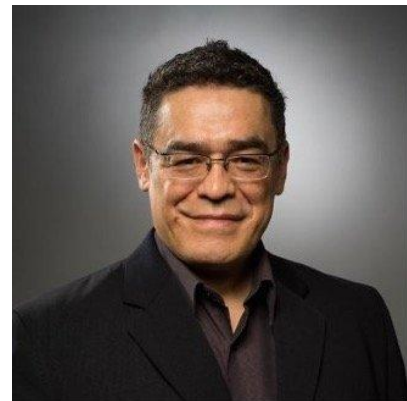
“Growing up in the Amazon, I shared the journey of many fellow indigenous: running away with my mother and my grandmother, seeing the villages being destroyed one after another by loggers, my relatives killed, or displaced, and the beautiful natural ecosystem surrounding being burned.”

Zaya Guarani - Indigenous Model and Activist -
watch [here](#)

“We share a conviction that our voices, spiritual resources and common commitment can bring new and needed urgency to the critically important work of protecting the Amazon and its guardians over the long term, and place ourselves at the disposal of achieving that goal.”

Lewis Cardinal, Trustee and Chair of the Indigenous Task Force, Parliament of the World's Religions Canada

- watch [here](#)



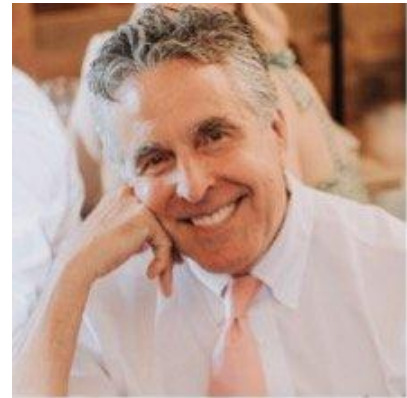
WELCOME LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Bodwéwadmí (Potawatomi), indigenous leader and Culture bearer of her indigenous nation in Chicago provided a welcoming prayer and land acknowledgment accompanied by the Iron Bear drum group comprised of the Southern Plains singing style and Ponca influence led by Sterling Big Bear III, Ponca, and Ihankowan. - watch [here](#)

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING RAINFORESTS AND THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

“Our way of life - and even our very lives - are now threatened by climate change and the loss of nature. If protected and restored, however, our tropical forests – especially the Amazon -- can actually help solve these crises. The UN understands that to protect and sustain the Amazon and other tropical rainforests we must recognize the rights of the indigenous peoples who have been responsibly stewarding these forests for centuries. That is what this event is all about.”



Dr. Charles McNeill, Senior Advisor on Forests and Climate for the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI) of the UN Environment Program (UNEP) - watch [here](#)



“The urgency of protecting the Amazon and supporting indigenous peoples in defending our lands demand a united front of strong support and solidarity. It is an uphill battle, and this is where the Parliament of the World’s Religions plays a pivotal role. This is a space where the religions of the world must rise as educators and mobilizers”

H.E. Sonia Guajajara, Minister of Indigenous Peoples, Brazil – watch [here](#)

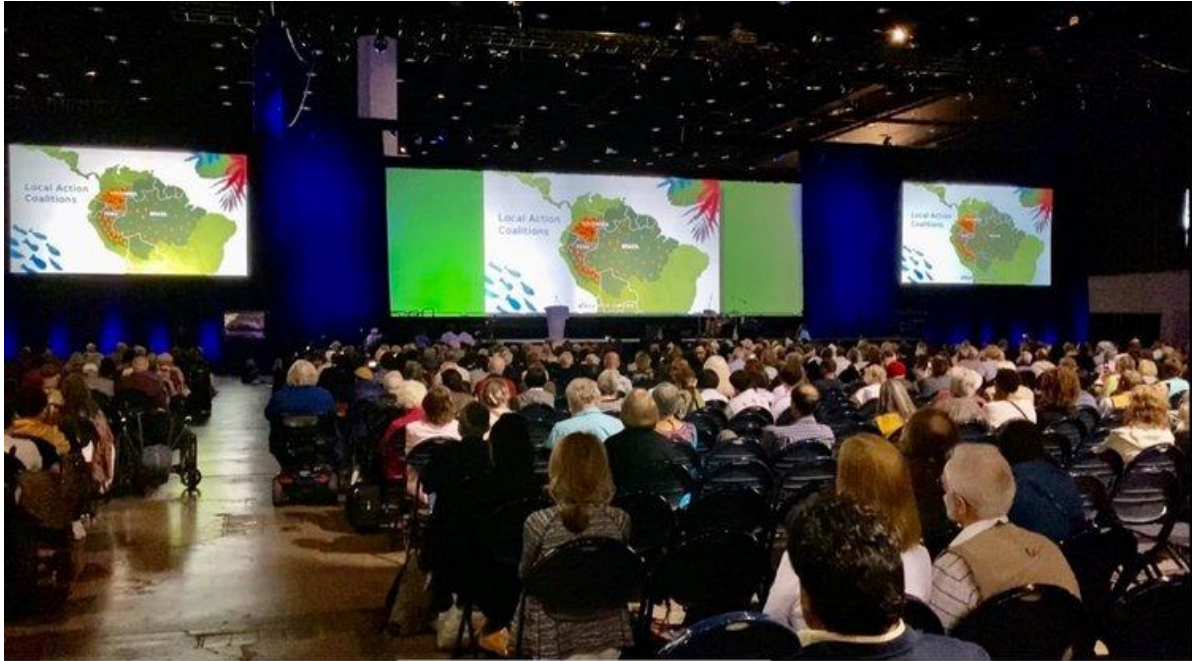
“IRI leverages the convening power of the United Nations and works in Brazil, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia and Peru - five countries that contain more than 70% of the world's remaining rainforests. [...] We have created a loving and welcoming environment so that religious leaders can understand the climate emergency, the urgency of stopping the destruction of the Amazon rainforest, and the importance of defending the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities. We have worked with all ideological and political backgrounds and even among the climate-deniers we



have gotten good results.”

Mr. Carlos Vicente, National Facilitator, Interfaith

Rainforest Initiative in Brazil (IRI-Brazil) - watch [here](#)



This section of the program ended with a video presentation of IRI’s work in the Amazon Basin, in particular in Brazil, Colombia and Peru - watch [here](#)

MESSAGES FROM INDIGENOUS LEADERS FROM THE AMAZON



“When you talk about the forest and taking away the right to land from indigenous peoples, you talk about killing the Amazon, you talk about killing the planet. I would like that all the religions around the world pay attention to this, not just for the Amazon but all the forests around the world. Plant the forests! Plant seeds! Instead of dropping bombs to kill people, drop bombs of seeds from within your hearts, souls, and minds.”

Benki Piyāko, President of the Yorenka Tasorentsi

Institute; Asháninka people, Brazil - watch [here](#).

“The Amazon is reaching a point of no return. If this happens, humanity will also reach a point of no return, because it would have destroyed the source of knowledge and the source of good energies that keep us in balance. We all need to support each other, unite and be allies in the fight for life. Taking care of nature as a source of life and spirituality is not just the responsibility of indigenous peoples, but of everyone”



Patricia Gualinga, Representative of Mujeres Amazónicas collective; Sarayaku community, Ecuador – watch [here](#).

“Today in this forum, we want to share our words and leave a message of peace, unity, and love to the different peoples of the world. This is a message about the importance of spirituality for all peoples. For thousands of years we have been protecting, caring, and fighting for the right to life and for the rights of mother earth.”



Alicia Mojomboy and Miguel Evanjuanoy, Union of Indigenous Yagé Doctors of the Colombian Amazon (UMIYAC) – watch [here](#).

“Indigenous territories hold more than 80% of the remaining biodiversity around the world. The only way to really protect the Amazon rainforest is to stand along with Indigenous nations, to allow us to keep practicing our culture, our language, our



spirituality.”

Daiara Tukano, Indigenous Artist and Human Rights Researcher; Tukano people, Brazil – watch [here](#)



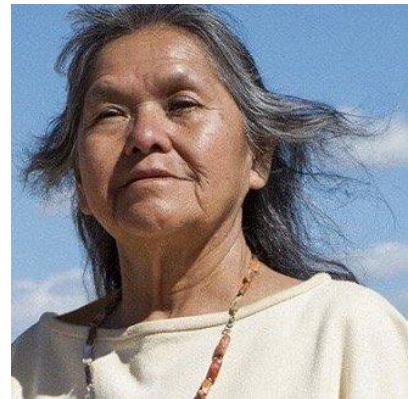
“We are facing great threats by industries in our territories, as well as the “Temporal Framework” that is being voted into law in Brazil so that our lands can be further invaded by loggers, miners, oil extractors, destroying river sources, nature, the forest and leave us without oxygen, taking away our future and those of coming generations”

Mapu Huni Kuin, President of the Hawa Karu Yushibu Center; Huni Kuin people, Brazil - watch [here](#)

RESPONDENTS

“Our relatives in the Amazon, this is the place the good Creator and mother Earth put them. They know no other home. How is it that our man-made laws are determining who shall enjoy the pursuits of life, of freedom, of their spiritual practices and beliefs? Why is it that way, that someone can determine the destination of another people who have been making this place their paradise?”

Mona Polacca, Hopi elder; Senior Fellow at the Center for Earth Ethics, USA – see [here](#)





“I wish to express gratitude for the enormous contribution of the Indigenous peoples to preserving our planet, to sustain it through their love of the rainforests and the cultures associated with it, to which they have shown such amazing dedication over thousands of years. We are all the beneficiaries of this love, this devotion and this dedication.”

“Religions for Peace is privileged to have pioneered the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative and joins the Parliament in their Call to the world to preserve respect to the rainforest and the indigenous peoples and their cultures”

**Rabbi David Rosen, Co-President of Religions for Peace;
Special Advisor to the Abrahamic Family House – see [here](#)**

PRAYER FOR THE AMAZON



“We are here all standing together as children of the Earth, Indigenous peoples from this land, united in the love of the beauty of Creation. I’d like to invite everyone to close their eyes and [...] reunite together in the ocean of Creation, in the emotion of gratitude and respect to life for every nation. [...] We salute all the nations and spiritualities.”

-Daiara Tukano, Indigenous Artist and Human Rights Researcher; Tukano people, Brazil

[-here](#)

AN URGENT CALL TO ACTION TO PROTECT THE AMAZON

“We, leaders gathered for the Parliament of the World’s Religions, offer this urgent call to action for the Amazon and the indigenous peoples and traditional communities who serve as its guardians.

We do so in solidarity with the indigenous peoples and traditional communities who call the Amazon home and who are at the forefront of efforts to protect their lands and territories, and informed by the scientific and research community warning of the dire consequences of the continued destruction and degradation of the Amazon”



Lewis Cardinal, Trustee and Chair of the Indigenous Task Force, Parliament of the World's Religions Canada – watch [here](#)

This event was made possible with the support of the [Indigenous Medicine Conservation Fund](#), Little Tree House and [the Boa Foundation](#).

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