



Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary – NGO with special consultative status in the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations since 2013 and with the Department of Public Information since 2006.

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RSHM at the UN

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BIODIVERSITY is the richness and variety of all species of life on earth. But it is under severe threat with unthinkable consequences for the support system of life on our planet. How is the UN engaged in addressing the loss of biodiversity? In this issue of **News from the UN**, we focus on the recent Conference of Parties to the convention on **Biological Diversity** which was held in Montreal, Canada, in December (**COP 15**). Through our participation as an observer NGO during one week of the Conference we had a privileged opportunity to accompany the process of arriving at an agreed **Global Biodiversity Framework** with clear goals and targets to be achieved by 2030 and 2050.



Secretary General's Opening Remarks.



On December 6th, UN Secretary General António Guterres delivered a hard-hitting address to the participants in the **Opening Plenary** of the UN Biodiversity Conference held in

Montreal, Canada. *"We are waging a war on nature" he said. "Ecosystems have become playthings of profit,... Humanity has become a weapon of mass extinction, with a million species at risk of disappearing forever...." With our bottomless appetite for unchecked and unequal economic growth, humanity has become a weapon of mass extinction. We are treating nature like a toilet. And ultimately, we are committing suicide by proxy."*

Urging the parties to the COP 15 to secure the future of the planetary life's support system, Inger Anderson, the head of the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** noted. *"Nature and biodiversity is dying the death of a billion cuts. and humanity is paying the price for betraying its closest friend."*

➔ Watch [the short video](#)

Background to COP 15



There are currently **196** parties to the **Convention on Biological Diversity – more than** the members of the United Nations. Like its sister conventions – on climate change and on desertification – the Biodiversity Convention came out of the **Earth Summit** in **1992**. However, unlike the convention on Climate change, no equivalent framework for implementation has been established.



The focus of the Conference was to come to agreement on the framework for action with **clear goals and targets** to be reached by 2030 and a few by 2050. But the COVID pandemic interfered with plans. The 15th meeting of parties to the Convention (COP 15) was postponed several



times over a period of more than two years because of the pandemic. Even the venue had to be changed from Kunming, China to Montreal, Canada. Although negotiations on the Framework began virtually,

they could not be finalized until the in-person meeting.

Almost all of the **196 parties to the Convention** were represented by delegations who were involved in the lengthy and complex negotiations. Despite differences, there was a strong sense of urgency regarding the need the need to come to consensus on an agreed outcome and this was achieved in the early hours of the morning of December 19th

➔ [Watch the video](#)

Did you know that...

- Humanity's **ecological footprint** exceeds Earth's biocapacity by over 50%, meaning that we would need **1.6 Earths** to sustain our unsustainable lifestyle.
- The **global rate of species extinction** is already at least **tens to hundreds of times** higher than it has averaged over the past **10 million years**
- By 2016, **559 of the 6,190 domesticated breeds** of mammals used for food and agriculture (**more than 9%**) had become extinct and at least **1,000** more are threatened.
- **Food systems** are also thought to drive about **70% of terrestrial** biodiversity loss and **50% of marine** biodiversity loss,
- Lands under the stewardship of **indigenous peoples** currently contain **80% of the world's remaining biodiversity**
- The world **lost 68% of its wildlife populations** between **1970 and 2016**.

Pope Francis on COP 15



In his message for the [World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation](#) last year, Pope Francis highlighted the importance of the COP 15 Summit. He called for prayer and action to urge nations to reach a multilateral agreement to “halt the destruction of ecosystems and the extinction of species”. Citing the ancient wisdom of the Jubilee, he stressed the need to “**remember, return, rest and restore**” in order

to halt the further collapse of our God-given “network of life”. He identified 4 fundamental principles as vital:

- **A clear ethical basis** for changes needed to save biodiversity;
- **supporting conservation and cooperation**, while satisfying people’s needs in a sustainable way;
- **promoting global solidarity** and recognizing biodiversity as a global common good
- giving **priority to people in situations of greatest vulnerability** to the effects of biodiversity loss.

“In the name of God, I ask the great extractive industries – mining, oil, forestry, real estate, agribusiness – to stop destroying forests, wetlands, and mountains, to stop polluting rivers and seas, to stop poisoning food and people”.

Pope Francis

Participating in COP 15 –Veronica Brand RSHM

Increasingly we are being reminded of the ‘**triple planetary crisis**’. **Climate change, biodiversity and pollution** are closely interrelated. We cannot take steps to address one without taking into account the others. In **Laudato Si**, Pope Francis draws our attention to this and our need for an ecological conversion if we are to **protect, conserve and restore** what is essential to the web of life. The proximity of Montreal and the ease with which we were accredited made it feasible for us to participate in the Conference. Our General Leadership Council was supportive and the RSHM were duly accredited in October.

I was one of three NY based representatives of religious congregations who attended. Because we represented accredited observer organizations we were able to take part in almost any session we chose, mingling with official Government delegations, NGOs and representatives of academia and UN agencies. As observers, we were able to attend the official plenary sessions, as well as all the side events, special events and even the “*Working Groups*” that formed part of the negotiating process. Press conferences were insightful; sometimes organized by the official delegations to give briefings on the negotiations and sometimes by grassroots NGO groups and Indigenous Peoples.

Being present for 7 days opened my eyes to the significance and complexity of this under-appreciated dimension of the current planetary crisis: the extinction of species. Each panel and themed session I attended was a learning experience, helping me to appreciate ever more deeply just what interdependence means in the web of life and how our style of consumption and our production



systems are impacting biodiversity and the life and livelihoods of those most marginalized. The threats posed to biodiversity globally are threats to the future of life on earth. The link to our RSHM mission and our RSHM Laudato Si commitment could not be clearer. We are called to an ecological conversion.

Women were notably present and active in senior leadership positions in all these spaces, - providing a notable contrast to some other UN conferences. This was most evident when the **Deputy Secretary General of the UN**, the **Executive Secretary of Biodiversity Convention** and the **Head of UN Environment** gave a press conference. It is significant that gender is identified as a “cross-cutting” issue and the focus of one specific target (Target 23) in the outcome document.



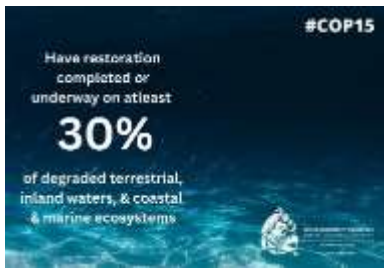
As part of the **Faith at Cop 15** ‘coalition, we received daily briefings on the progress of the negotiations, participated in events and gathered with representatives of other faiths, indigenous peoples and women from around the world. At the small pavilion allocated to the faith-based constituency, we met representatives of the Laudato Si Movement from Canada and Kenya and colleagues from the Parliament of the World’s Religions, among many others.

A series of events highlighted initiatives related to biodiversity that were run by different faith traditions. The shared values and the strong ethical and moral commitment was evident in the stories and experiences shared. On December 16th we came together to suggest ideas for future collaboration and charting the way forward.



Conservation commitment : “30 by 30”

One of the key targets agreed in the outcome document but a challenging sticking point in the negotiations on the Global Biodiversity Framework at COP 15 related to the commitment to **protect 30% of the earth’s land and coastal / marine areas by 2030**. This is key to tackling both climate change and biodiversity loss since, if left intact,



protected ecosystems provide a haven for life and help to soak up and store carbon dioxide released by human beings. These would be designated as protected conservation areas: the so-called “**30 X 30**”.

Controversy during the negotiations focused on the extent to which this would encroach upon the ancestral lands and livelihoods of indigenous people who have actually served in a guardianship role for many of these lands for centuries. Advocacy by **Indigenous Peoples and activists** helped to incorporate a specific reference to “*recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories*” in the final text. While this outcome was the laudable fruit of compromise, many spoke about the urgency of securing funding to support efforts in least developed countries and the importance of conserving biodiversity in the **remaining 70%** of terrestrial and ocean areas.

➡ Watch the [short video](#)

Deep Sea Mining

Mining could soon begin in one of the most fragile ecosystems on the planet: **the deep seabed**. Deep Sea Mining is a new threat to the integrity of ecosystems and the wellbeing of coastal peoples that is a cause of great concern. The seabed is a rich source of biodiversity which is essential to all life and is still largely unexplored. Much of it is considered to be in international waters and part of the common heritage of humanity. Rare minerals that exist in nodules found on the ocean floor are viewed by some businesses as a source of wealth to be extracted for use in batteries. Experimental permits have been granted by the **International Seabed Authority** to companies to explore this. Two Canadian companies are at the forefront of this experimental mining work which has already produced negative consequences for coastal communities.



Scientists have argued that the impact could diminish species which would require thousands or even millions of years to recover. The risks related to seabed mining are not limited to local areas but extend to all humanity since the oceans are a major carbon sink, helping to regulate the climate. The preliminary assessment of experimental seabed mining led to scientists making a strong call at the UN Ocean Conference in June 2022 for a moratorium on seabed mining. A growing coalition of 100 conservation groups has formed and a campaign has been launched by Mining Watch, Canada. Efforts are underway to call for an outright ban on deep sea mining until and unless the multiple impacts on humanity and the planet are studied and effective remedies found.

➡ Watch the [short video](#)

The Biodiversity Framework – COP 15 Outcome

In the early hours of the morning of December 19th, nearly 200 nations agreed on a historic Framework for action to “**halt and reverse**” biodiversity loss by the end of the decade and to restore natural ecosystems. Four goals are spelled out and 23 key targets are identified. Among them are the following:

- **Fair and equitable sharing of the benefits** arising from the use of genetic resources (*Target 13*)
- Encourage and enable businesses to **monitor, assess and disclose** their impacts on biodiversity (*Target 15*)
- Encourage **sustainable consumption**, including by **reducing food waste** by half by 2030. (*Target 16*)
- **Mobilize \$200 billion per year** by 2030 (*Target 19*) ➡ [Read more....](#)



COP 15 BRIEFS

Ecocide



StopEcocide International is a foundation aiming to protect the earth by making **ecocide an international crime** for which offenders, be they states or businesses, can be held accountable. With the aid of international networks and campaign support, they aim to deter the most destructive processes that inflict long term harm on the environment, leading to the global climate and ecological crisis.

➡ Watch [the video](#) ➡ [Act now.](#)

Forests.

Fast Fact: *Deforestation delivers 11 percent of emissions.*

The **Interfaith Rainforest Initiative** aims to bring the **commitment, influence and moral authority** of the world’s religions to efforts to protect the world’s rainforests and the indigenous peoples who serve as their guardians. Listen to Jane Goodall speak about the importance of ‘*stewardship of the earth and care for creation*’.

➡ Watch [the short video](#)
➡ Read the [Declaration.](#)



Pollinations

Fast fact: *More than 70% of the food we eat every day depends on pollination.*

Bees are crucial for **biodiversity and health** all over the world. They are the most important pollinators of the 240,000 species of flowering plants and more than half of the 3000 species which ensure the survival and diversity of food crops and medicinal plants.

➡ Watch [the video](#)



Ecosystem Restoration

Fast Fact: *Land degradation has reduced productivity in 23 per cent of the global terrestrial area and 1/3 of all soil is degraded.*

During COP 15 the UN recognized **TEN flagship projects** that are large-scale and long-term pioneering initiatives to restore ecosystems. Between them, they aim to restore more than 68 million hectares – an area bigger than France – and create nearly 15 million jobs in areas spanning the globe. ➡ [Read more...](#)



Plastic Pollution

Fast Fact: *Since the 1950s, only 10% of plastics ever produced have re-entered the value chain through recycling or reuse.*



Plastic pollution has adverse impacts on ocean ecosystems, the integrity of food supplies, and people's livelihoods. Marine plastic pollution has increased tenfold since 1980, affecting at least 267

species. Without policy measures, it is predicted to double by 2030. The **Global Biodiversity Framework** includes a generic target (#7) on pollution from all sources to levels that, "not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services" while also "preventing, reducing, and working towards eliminating plastic pollution

➡ Watch the [short video](#)

➡ Sign [the international petition](#)

Harmful subsidies

Fast Fact: *The world is spending \$1.8 trillion a year on subsidies that drive annihilation of wildlife and an increase in global warming.*



Many governments subsidize certain large-scale industries such as agriculture fisheries and energy produced by fossil fuels although these incentives actually have harmful effects on nature. Target 18 of the agreed Biodiversity Framework calls for the reduction of these incentives by "at least 500 billion dollars a year by 2030". It also calls for the scaling up positive incentives for conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity.

➡ Watch [the short video](#)



Distribution

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