

Amazon: New paths for the Church and for an integral ecology

OPENING REMARKS

FAO Director-General, Dr. QU Dongyu

Sheikh Zayed Centre, 4 June 2024 (2.30pm – 4.30pm)

1. It is a pleasure for me to open this Seminar on “New paths for the Church and for an integral ecology” in the Amazon.
2. I would like to thank the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the Rome-based agencies and the General Secretariat of the Synod for choosing to host this event at FAO headquarters.
3. We look forward to learning about the results of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region.
4. The Pan-Amazon region is of fundamental importance for the whole world, for its biodiversity, its contribution to fight climate change and for its Indigenous Peoples.
5. The Amazon is inhabited by 34 million people. Many of them are Indigenous Peoples that belong to about 420 Indigenous communities.
6. The purpose of the Synod, as reiterated by His Holiness Pope Francis, is “to reconcile the right to development, including social and cultural, with the protection of the characteristics of Indigenous Peoples and their territories”.

7. I want to reiterate that FAO is fully committed to working with Indigenous Peoples in respect of their rights and for the preservation, strengthening and promotion of their food and knowledge systems.
8. FAO has had its own Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in place since 2010.
9. This guides FAO's work towards the recognition, respect and promotion of Indigenous Peoples' rights.
10. It is aligned with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, and it includes the right to free, prior and informed consent.
11. FAO considers Indigenous Peoples as key allies for the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.
12. Their food and knowledge systems are game changers in the transformation towards more sustainable and resilient agrifood systems.
13. At the same time, despite great efforts, Indigenous Peoples make up a substantial portion of the world's food insecure.
14. FAO is committed to working with Indigenous Peoples to eradicate hunger and malnutrition.
15. Our work with Indigenous Peoples in the Pan-Amazon Region is helping to enhance sustainability, food security, climate action and biodiversity protection.
16. One of the best examples is the Indigenous Peoples' biocentric restoration initiative, which recognizes Indigenous Peoples as custodians of biodiversity.

17. FAO built this approach together with Indigenous representatives, to restore degraded ecosystems through Indigenous Peoples-led processes that are rooted in their histories.
18. The initiative puts Indigenous Peoples' food and knowledge systems at the centre, and strengthens their territorial management practices. It is working worldwide. In the Pan-Amazon region FAO is supporting initiatives of Indigenous Peoples' biocentric restoration in Colombia, Ecuador and Brazil.
19. FAO recognizes the fundamental role of Indigenous Youth in the fight against hunger.
20. In October 2023, FAO co-organized the Second Session of the Biennial UN Global Indigenous Youth Forum together with the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, and the World Reindeer Herders Association.
21. This Second Session brought together 186 Indigenous Youth from 54 countries and 98 different groups to discuss the future of their food and knowledge systems.
22. Indigenous Youth delegates made their voices heard on the initiatives that they lead in their regions to preserve biodiversity, mitigate climate change, and preserve their knowledge systems from rapid erosion.
23. Some came from the Pan-Amazon region and voiced their concerns with FAO Members, UN Agencies, and the academic world on the future of their food and knowledge systems.
24. At the end of the Forum, Indigenous Youth issued the "Rome Declaration on Safeguarding Future Generations in times of Food, Social and Ecological Crisis".

25.The Declaration addresses themes such as the impacts of pesticides, extraction industries and ultra-processed foods on Indigenous Peoples, the protection of Indigenous plant genetic resources, and the importance of Indigenous-led education.

26.FAO is committed to working with Indigenous Youth and listening to their recommendations.

27.I believe this Seminar, organized by the Holy See, will allow all of us to better understand different voices, lessons learned and perspectives from the ground on how to work collectively for more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.