People attend a protest in Belem, Brazil, July 23, 2025, advocating for climate justice months ahead of U.N. Climate Change Conference, COP30, that Belem will be hosting in November. (OSV News/Reuters/Wagner Santana)

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With the 30th U.N. Climate Change Conference, or COP30, set for November in Belém, Brazil, Catholic leaders are raising their voices ahead of the global climate summit.

A Sept. 18 webinar held by the Maryknoll Office of Global Concern addressed the climate priorities of the peoples of the Global South, especially those of the Amazon region and the Guaraní Aquifer region — located beneath the surface of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. It's the largest known aquifer system in the world.

The panel also addressed the priorities of the People's Summit, a parallel meeting led by environmental movements, social organizations and Indigenous peoples that highlights the concerns of local communities suffering the effects of the climate crisis and proposes solutions based on reality in the pursuit of climate justice.

Webinar speaker Franciscan Br. Rodrigo Peret, from Brazil, reflected on the urgency of taking joint action that transcends diplomacy and warned of the dangers of denialist governments and "false promises of a green transition" that do not change the unjust economic model where "the poor always pay the highest price." Instead, it deepens the effects of climate change, such as forest fires, devastating storms in coastal areas, droughts and floods.

He also questioned the contradiction of the Brazilian government as it prepares to host the summit amid its quest to position itself as a climate leader through speeches about a just energy transition and protection of the Amazon, when "the economic fundamentals are tied to an extractive model."

"How can a nation say it can be a climate leader if it is trying to pass laws to open up Indigenous lands to mining?" said Peret, who called for "rebuilding democracy and sovereignty" and prioritizing the rights of people and nature over profitability and economic interests.

Lisa Sullivan, integral ecology program officer at the Maryknoll Office of Global Concern, noted that 2024 has been the year in which the planet has recorded the highest temperatures and that, according to a report from the same year by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, humanity has six years to reverse its effects or else cataclysmic climate events will unfold. "That was 18 months ago. The clock is still ticking," she said.

After a historical overview of the COP conferences, she recalled that the goals to which governments committed themselves were aimed at taking climate action focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, protecting human life and ecosystems and securing economic resources in developing countries to enable them to implement such actions in a long-term and sustained manner.

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"One sign that gives us hope is that more faith-based organizations and religious leaders are going to COP," said Sullivan, who said that among the challenges of this summit are ensuring a just energy transition, strengthening multilateralism, and closing the financial gap between what is really needed to address climate change and the funds that have been pledged or delivered so far.

Sullivan said that although climate conferences have not been perfect, they have made progress, as before the 2015 Paris Agreement, global temperatures were projected to rise by more than 3 degrees Celsius (37.4 degrees Fahrenheit), but now they are estimated to rise by 2.7 degrees Celsius (36.86 degrees Fahrenheit), a reduction that can save lives and ecosystems. She recalled that the goal is to limit warming to less than 2 degrees Celsius (35.6 Fahrenheit), ideally below 1.5 degrees Celsius (34.7 Fahrenheit), compared to pre-industrial levels.

Meanwhile, Mercy Sr. Rosita Sidasmed, executive secretary of the Ecclesial Network of the Gran Chaco and Guarani Aquifer, spoke of the importance of the church having a voice in nonecclesial spaces such as the COP, where faith communities participate and share their vision.

She explained that since November 2024, the church in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa have been preparing the document "A Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home: Ecological Conversion, Transformation and

Resistance to False Solutions," which was presented in July at the Vatican and was supported by the ecclesial networks focused on ecology.

Rosita, who helped to write this document, underlined that the authors seek to highlight how these climate crises mainly affect those who contribute least to them: the Global South, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. She pointed to "excessive consumption in the Global North" as the main cause of the climate crisis, with the Global South suffering the consequences.

She reflected on how the Gospel invites us to sobriety as "a way to resist, reduce superfluous consumption, guaranteeing what is necessary for a dignified life for all, with limits on the accumulation of wealth and an economy that believes resources are infinite."

Among the actions to mitigate the crisis, Rosita highlighted the importance of promoting solidarity economies, strengthening local leadership, and protecting territories from destructive megaprojects.

"We could not call ourselves Christians in this century, at this historic moment, if we are not able to hear the cry of nature, the cry of the earth, and the cry of the poor in a joint manner," she said.

Finally, Juan Felipe Martínez, executive secretary of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network, or REPAM, elaborated on the importance of COP30 being held in the Amazon and the need to put the Amazon at the center of global climate decisions because "it is the largest biome that provides ecosystem and climate regulation services to all of humanity," he explained.

"The burden that the world in general, especially the countries of the North, is placing on the Amazon, will soon reach a point where it will no longer be able to regulate the climate or clean up the greenhouse gases and CO2 that we produce in different countries," warned Martínez, adding that "we are at a point of no return for the Amazon in cultural and social terms due to the persecution and destruction of the cultures of our communities."

This story appears in the **COP30 Brazil** feature series. View the full series.