

Seeds from COP30: Reflections from The Episcopal Church



Indigenous voices were present moreso at COP 30 than at any other COP Conference to date.

One outcome of significance was the “signing of Just Transition Mechanism, meant to guide how we transition to green energy and green economies through upholding justice nationally, workers rights, and international finance flows. It highlights the need to consult with indigenous communities.”

The rest of the Conference produced “mixed reviews at best.”

Martha Gar said, “Brazil had hoped to see a roadmap for phasing out fossil fuels in the final negotiations - it didn’t come to pass. There was pushback from Saudis, Russia, and developing countries who need more commitment from developed countries for finance before they feel they don’t have to rely on fossil fuels.

“There was only a trickling of the adaptation fund commitments meant to assist communities experiencing the greatest impacts of climate change now and in the future.

“In the future this Conference requires all world governments in attendance so that they can share their different perspectives and organize around them.

“COP30 offered an honest reflection of where we are globally [with climate justice and progress].”

According to Rev. Shanequa Brokenleg, Indigenous voices were given only lip service. “Government is in bed with corporations which results in resource extraction and environmental degradation” that impacts the health and well being of Indigenous communities. She saw some “hope with increased tribal sovereignty.”

She witnessed “joy and hope, even in lament”; and would like to see similar expression across our Episcopal communities.

“Churches with power need to give some of it over to Indigenous folks to amplify their voices where they aren’t being heard. We need to support and not be allies but be “co-conspirators, willing to risk our power and privilege to do what needs to be done to protect the Earth and protect people who will be harmed by extraction.”

OGR’s Susie Faria commented, “Renewable energy sectors continue to see massive growth, even as the US Federal government has been working to slow it down on the domestic front.

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According to US Episcopal youth attendee Coco DeMarneff, “Although a declaration to transition from fossil fuels was not in the final text, Columbia, along with the Netherlands, announced an international conference supported by 24 countries to be held next April on the just transition from fossil fuels. Also a number of countries plan to work together to make their own progress.

“There were 30,000 people at this COP. Visual advocacy, signage for fossil fuel transition was a critical “voice” at the conference.”

Dr Lisa Gramlich, an Episcopal priest and geoscientist representing the American Geophysical Union, a global group representing 100,000 scientists around the world. She perceived a geopolitical shift at the Conference that hasn't gotten much attention: The Tropical Forest Forever Facility. “The TFFF pays countries annually for keeping their forest standing. This is different from carbon offsets and how we have traditionally talked about tropical forests, preservation and conservation. It's a recognition that intact forests provide ongoing services to the whole planet and the world should pay for that, NOT use it as permission to keep emitting carbon. It will provide result-based payments to tropical forest countries, making standing forest worth more by not cutting them down. At the end of the Conference, over \$6.7 billion was promised in the first phase, with endorsement from 63 countries, with major contributors Norway, Germany, Indonesia, France, and Brazil; although that is short of the \$25 billion first phase target and the \$125 billion end goal, with critics calling this an underwhelming response.”

Gramlich believes that this focus misses the point. “*Who designed it matters:* Brazil, Indonesia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Malaysia, and Colombia. For the first time in history, countries of the Global South will take a leading role in a forest agenda. *The governance structure matters:* in the hands of both the forest and the donor nations with equal partnership. *Whose knowledge is centered matters.* At least 20% of the funding is earmarked for Indigenous peoples and local communities. This is a structural recognition that Indigenous people have been the primary forest stewards, and that their leadership, not just their land, is essential. There is criticism that the fund doesn't address two structural causes of forest destruction: it does not prioritize local and Indigenous communities; and Indigenous people at the Conference stressed, ‘Our land is not for sale.’”

However “TFFF represents real progress in global environmental governance, yet still falls short of justice that forest communities deserve. This asks of faith communities: do we advocate for governance structures where power is genuinely shared? Do we hold hope for both progress and for the prophetic critique that more is needed?” According to Gramlich, “this could be one of the most significant, if not the defining, outcomes of COP30 because it’s a shift on who is leading. The *seeds* of a very different kind of global cooperation were planted!” We need to make local communities aware and engaged in promoting this work.

Rev. Lester Mackenzie ended the meeting in prayer:

Holy Creator God, God of dawn and dark; of ocean depths and forest heights. In this Advent season we wait, we watch, we listen. We wait like our ancestors waited: with longing, with courage, with hope that refuses to die. We lift up the Amazon. We honor Indigenous guardians, for their song, their prayers, their protection. We lift up our Anglican Communion family, especially for our siblings in Brazil. We pray for and with them. We lift up our interfaith siblings, who work quietly, boldly, faithfully.

God, breathe in us the spirit of our ancestors, those who prayed with sea, with wind, with roots and rain; and who knew land and water as siblings, who taught us to listen deeply to earth and spirit. Let that memory strengthen our bodies and steady our steps. Light of Advent, shine on the forest, shine on the ocean, shine on the people, shine on our home. Amen