



The 2024 UN Biodiversity Conference Explained

Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence ... We have no such right.

-Pope Francis, Laudato Si

What?

This will be the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. It will be held between October 21 - November 1, 2024, with the theme **Peace with Nature**. This convention grew out of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which called upon the world to address, halt, and reverse the global loss of biodiversity.

Where?

COP 16 is being held in **Colombia**, one of the most biodiverse countries on the planet, home to 54,000 recognized species. The Amazon rainforest spanning the country is largely protected by Indigenous Peoples, an important voice in the conversation. While the Colombian government pushes an ambitious climate plan to phase out fossil fuels, transition to clean energy, and end national deforestation by 2030, controversy has arisen over its neglect of protecting environmental defenders. Colombia has proposed the focus of the convention be on peace with nature.

Why?

The rich diversity of creation is at risk. The exploitation of natural resources, overconsumption, land-use changes, and environmental pollution harm the biodiverse ecosystems we are meant to steward. Since 1970, we have seen a [69% decrease in global wildlife populations](#), a reality that will lead to the threat of extinction for [one million species](#) within the next few decades if nothing is done. Indigenous people have been the best stewards of biodiversity, and over 80% of the remaining biodiversity is on their lands. Yet, hostility from extractive companies and conservation efforts

Who?

Fifteen thousand people are expected, including:

- **Official Delegations** from over 190 countries who are parties to the Convention. The U.S. is not among them. Efforts have been made by most U.S. presidents since 1992 to join the convention, but international treaties require a two-thirds Senate majority that has so far eluded them.
- **Indigenous communities** will voice their concerns and share insights.
- **Accredited Observers** will attend, including representatives of faith organizations, civil society, activists, students, politicians, and others, including Maryknoll missionaries.

to displace people threaten the symbiotic relationship between these people and their land.

During COP15, progress was made with the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Diversity Framework (GBF) that introduced [The Biodiversity Plan](#), conserving 30% of the earth's land and water, restoring 30% of degraded ecosystems, and decreasing the introduction of invasive species by 50%, all by 2030. This conference, COP 16, seeks to take concrete steps towards the implementation of these goals.

Maryknoll engagement with biodiversity

- In **Guatemala**, Maryknoll Sisters work with St. Mary's Eco Farm. This integrated small organic farm is situated amid monocultural devastation and aims to respond positively to the call for the conservation and protection of the biodiversity of the southwest coastal region of Guatemala.
- In **Kenya**, the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers support a reforestation project in the semi-arid area of Kibwezi. They grow drought-resistant trees that provide a source of nutrition and income to community members, especially during the dry seasons.
- In **El Salvador**, Maryknoll Lay Missioners worked for many years near Cojutepeque promoting sustainable agriculture and greater environmental awareness, allowing families to grow more crops, conserve water, and save seeds for the next planting
- In **Panama**, Maryknoll Sisters *transformed 100 acres* of deforested land into a vibrant rainforest ecosystem and permaculture farm.
- At the **United Nations**, Maryknoll missionaries and staff of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns will attend the UN Conference on Biodiversity as official observers. They will also present a side event "Strengthening Indigenous and Local Community Partnerships" featuring Maasai pastoralists from Tanzania and community leaders from the Colombian Amazon.

Hopes & Ambitions?

Maryknoll representatives to the UN and other members of faith communities advocate for the following outcomes to be generated by the UN Biodiversity Conference:

- **Protect environmental defenders** advocating for land and water protection, focusing on advocates in Latin America threatened with significant violence.
- **Ensure leadership of Indigenous and local communities** in biodiversity conservation. Eighty percent of remaining biodiversity on the planet is on their traditional lands making it imperative to respect and protect both their right to stay on their land and to assume leadership in its protection.
- **Ambitious implementation** of the Kunming Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) that aims to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.
- Priority should be given to submissions of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.
- **Address biodiversity loss and climate change** at the same time, with combined efforts to restore biodiverse ecosystems while mitigating the effects of climate change, integrating policies at national and international levels.
- **Ensure adequate funding** for biodiversity conservation, expanding access to resources, and advocating for increased financing from developed countries, including \$20 billion from the U.S. by 2025.



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