

# Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation News

## Congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours

Indigenous  
Peoples:  
Defenders  
Of  
Earth



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"I want to be a spokesman for the deepest longings of indigenous peoples. I want to add your voice to mine that all will respect indigenous peoples, threatened in their identity and even in their existence." Pope Francis

The United Nations' *International Day of the World's Indigenous People* is observed on August 9 each year to promote and protect the rights of the world's indigenous population. This year's celebration marks the 11th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: a global consensus that establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for their survival, dignity and well-being. This occasion also provides an opportunity to highlight the contributions and achievements which our indigenous neighbors have made towards resolving various world-based issues, including protection of the environment.

As a Congregation whose mission focus is to "defend and care for all creation", we find inspiration in the many indigenous people whose commitment to defend and protect Earth has cost them dearly and in some cases has cost them their lives. This issue of JPIC News will feature the cost and the blessing that our indigenous neighbors' commitment to Earth are to us as we accompany each other in the pursuit of protecting and defending our common home.

August  
JPIC Days of Remembrance

August 6 and 9  
Anniversary of the Bombings of  
Hiroshima & Nagasaki

August 9  
International Day of World's  
Indigenous Peoples



August 19  
World Humanitarian Day

August 23  
International Day for  
Remembrance of the  
Slave Trade & Its Abolition

August 29  
International Day  
Against Nuclear Tests



### Our Indigenous Neighbors by the Numbers

- An estimated 370 million indigenous people live in the world today residing in 90 countries.
- They make up 5% of the world's population but account for 15% of the poorest.
- They speak 4,000 languages and represent 5,000 cultures.
- In 2017 almost four people a week were killed worldwide in struggles against mines, plantations, poachers and infrastructure projects. 40% of them were indigenous people.
- Most of the killings occurred in remote forest areas of developing countries, particularly in Latin America.

- Since 2015, 145 land and environmental defenders have died in Brazil, the highest number on Earth. The Philippines comes second on the list, with 102 deaths in all. Honduras remains the most dangerous country to be a defender, with more killings per capita than anywhere else.
- Although nine out of every 10 murdered activists are male, women defenders face gender-specific threats including sexual violence, harassment of their children, and discrimination in their communities.

Sources: The Guardian and Global Witness



A cross on the side of the road painted in the colors of the Nasa indigenous people in Columbia, reads, "Lord forgive them, for they know not what they do." Photograph: Tom Laffay for the Guardian

Sisters of Bon Secours...Women of healing...defending and caring for all creation (Mission Focus)

**Maxima Acuña** stands about 4½ feet tall, and has never set foot inside of a school. She can neither read nor write and has never been affiliated with any outside organization. However, the 47-year-old subsistence farmer and grandmother has been resisting the largest multinational mining project in Peru for the past five years, standing up for indigenous communities across the region.



## Industries at the Heart of the Indigenous Conflicts

Mining and Oil – Logging  
 Agro-business – Poaching  
 Water and Dams

Governments and business are failing to tackle the root cause of the violence against indigenous people: the imposition of extractive projects on communities without their free, prior and informed consent.

Investors, including development banks, are fueling the violence by financing abusive projects and failing to support threatened local activists.

Criminalization and aggressive civil cases are being used to stifle environmental activism and land rights defense around the world, including in ‘developed’ countries like the US.

Máxima Acuña successfully helped halt the development of the controversial Conga mining project. After refusing to sell her land to Newmont Mining in 2011, Acuña and her family faced lawsuits, death threats and assault. She and her daughter have been beaten unconscious twice and their home demolished. Last year, Peru’s Supreme Court acquitted her of aggravated encroachment charges brought by Newmont.

*“I never had the chance to go the school, I never had to chance to learn even a letter but I know how to resist, to fight and that’s why I will never be defeated by the mining companies.” (Máxima Acuña)*

Source: NRDC

We must undertake the struggle in all parts of the world, wherever we may be, because we have no other spare or replacement planet. We have only this one and we have to take action.

Berta Cáceres

**Berta Cáceres** rallied the indigenous Lenca people of Honduras and waged a grassroots campaign that successfully pressured the world’s largest dam builder to pull out of the Agua Zarca Dam project. Agua Zarca, slated for construction on the sacred Gualcarque River, was pushed through without consulting the indigenous Lenca people — a violation of international treaties governing indigenous peoples’ rights. The dam would cut off the supply of water, food and medicine for hundreds of Lenca people and violate their right to sustainably manage and live off their land. Cáceres was the victim of multiple death threats that continued until March 3, 2016



when she was killed by gunmen in her home in La Esperanza, Honduras. Her death sparked international outrage. Dutch development bank FMO and Finn Fund have since suspended their involvement in the Agua Zarca project.

Source: Goldman Environmental Prize



The **Kayapó** are the guardians of the Amazon rainforest. For 30 years they’ve been on the front line of rainforest defense, protecting the world’s richest ecosystem for all. This indigenous community helped stop construction of a gold mine, Esperanca IV, in the municipality of Altamira, which was shut down by federal inspectors in 2016 just a year after it received its license. The government stopped the project and fined its operators 50 million reais (USD 16 million) violating deforestation restrictions. Mercury and other pollutants from the mine threatened the Curuá River, the source of livelihood and food of the Kayapó people. They spoke out against the project from the beginning and celebrated the Brazilian government’s decision to stop the project. They vowed to continue fighting future projects that threatened their territories and communities.

Source: NRDC

## Reflection

What new awareness has the content in this edition of JPIC News offered you?  
 What has it stirred in you?

How are your efforts to “defend and care for creation” supporting the efforts of our indigenous brothers and sisters?

An “ecological conversion” will come at a cost.  
 What is this ecological conversion costing you?  
 What has been the blessing?

## International Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Committee

Sr. Teresa Margot Benites Montero, CBS (Peru)  
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