

Praying for Persecuted Environmental Defenders

“They do not say in their hearts, ‘Let us fear the Lord our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest.’ Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have kept good from you.” (Jeremiah 5:24–25)

Without forgetting those who have been tortured, disappeared, condemned without fair trial, and otherwise afflicted, our vigilance and prayer this year are meant to offer steadfast support to all environmental defenders persecuted for their commitment to life — in the awareness of the deep solidarity binding all living beings: plants, animals, and humans, in respect of their natural environment.

With ever-growing urgency, we are becoming conscious of our responsibility as human beings in the unravelling of the climate and the alarming impoverishment of biodiversity: birds are becoming scarce, glaciers are melting, forests are burning more than ever before, sea levels are rising, and species — both plant and animal — are disappearing every day, we are told.

Faced with these deeply troubling disruptions to the conditions of our existence, we understand that we must move beyond a human-centred vision of the world. We are learning that ecology, economics, and politics are inseparably linked: no peace without justice, no peace without solidarity between the privileged and the less fortunate, no peace without welcoming the victims of climate upheaval, and without supporting those who strive for new economic, ecological, and social ways of living.

ACAT’s monthly calls for action regularly feature “environmental rights defenders” who are being harassed or sentenced in Mexico, Vietnam, South America, and elsewhere. A statistic from Global Witness, cited by Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of environmental defenders (cf. the journal *Humains* no. 27, November–December 2022, p. 18), tells us that “49% of the defenders killed in 2021 were environmental defenders.”

The recognition of this emergency and the need for response has in recent years given rise to a number of initiatives, a few of which we enumerate here:

- The work and proposals of the World Council of Churches (WCC), going back to the 1960s, including a programme disseminated to member churches in the 1990s: JPIC = Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.
- The Orthodox churches, through Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios — known as the “green patriarch” — were among the first, already in the 1980s, to take a serious interest in ecology and the environment. Many Orthodox, Catholic, and other Christian denominations, together with the WCC, followed that call, dedicating 1 September to prayer for the protection of the environment — as Patriarch Bartholomew recalled in November during his meeting in Lourdes with the Pope and French Catholic bishops.
- Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’* (2015), which had a profound worldwide impact.
- The development of the “Bible et Création” network, now called “Espérer pour le vivant” (“Hope for the Living”), as well as the founding and growth of the ecumenical association “Église Verte” (“The Green Church”), with its certification programme for parishes, congregations, and other groups.
- The synods of the Église Protestante Unie de France (EPUdF) in 2020 and 2021, which resulted in a public declaration grounded in theological, ethical, and practical reflection.

- A gathering of 15 Church Alliances in Assisi in 2024, which provided an occasion for reflection aimed at establishing and formalising a liturgical Season of Creation, as has been practised for several years, from 1 September to 4 October, with a “Feast of Creation” on 1 September.

As Christians, we are attentive to the human journey guided by faith in the God of Israel, the God of Jesus Christ, and we are convinced that it is our calling to promote solidarity among all living things, and to support those who, in various ways, seek to give voice to the cry of the earth and the cry of suffering men and women — those who commit themselves, in hope, to a liveable future for both humanity and the planet, grounded in justice and peace.

We recall that it was through a long and turbulent journey through the Desert that the people of the Bible were forged and strengthened, learning perseverance, sobriety, and frugality — beyond the nostalgic longing for the pots of meat and vegetables in Egypt, the daily manna... In the same spirit, at our own individual level, we wish to resist the relentless incitements to overconsumption, encouraged by a frenzied headlong rush, expressed among other things in commercial events such as “Black Friday.”

The biblical wisdom books — Job (chapters 38–42), Ecclesiastes, the Psalms — invite us to find or recover a just and humble place within a universe called into life by God. The prophets (cf. the biblical text proposals in this dossier) highlight the recurring interaction between human behaviour and the disruption of seasonal cycles and other so-called “natural” disasters.

We are called to take seriously the human vocation as expressed in the opening pages of the Bible: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it...” (Genesis 1:28) — not as an injunction to an all-consuming power that has proved so destructive, but as a responsibility of respectful stewardship towards each element of Creation, all of which was declared “good” (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).

We keep firmly in mind and heart the primary goals of ACAT: that there should be no death penalty anywhere, no torture in any place, no asylum seekers or migrants treated without dignity.

We wish to remain attentive and watchful, for the evolution of the planet and the world, to the interplay of ecological, economic, and social realities, and to support those who are committed to ensuring that these dimensions of life are genuinely considered. With this in mind, we invite all to experience the “Night of Vigil 2026” in the spirit of ACAT’s present engagement: **Resisting Indignity.**