

## REPORTS from COP 226



**From Mary Jo:** I was looking forward to Cop 26 for a long time, knowing that I was able to go to Glasgow and hoping that there might be important outcomes for our planet. I am not going to go into the outcomes – you will all have heard about those on the news. I do want to share the experience of being there and

something about the people I met who gave me hope.

First of all, I want to thank Margaret Lee for the hospitality in Castlemilk. Veronica Brand and I were there first and then joined by Maria Pizzoni (a friend of Noddfa, who had been the Justice and Peace coordinator in our diocese) and later by Mary Kate Torre (the daughter of Noreen O’Neill, who spent time with us in Brazil).



Ellen O’Leary was due to come, but when the Covid situation became serious again she realised it would not be possible to travel. Castlemilk was in a good position for us to reach the site of Cop 26 by train. On two of the days we met Eleanor and were able to share the experience with her.



*Margaret, Mary Jo and Maria, after planting a bush in the garden)*

*Mary Jo, Eleanor, Mary Kate and Veronica at COP*

Glasgow gave everyone a great welcome. There were volunteers who had left their jobs to be present at all the stations and bus stops as well as on the road between the Blue Zone and the Green zone – always smiling and asking ‘Can I help you?’

The voices that remain with me – in my heart and in my head – urging me to keep faithful to my commitment to the Earth and all life on it – are those of the Indigenous people, the youth and different groups of walkers.



The indigenous people are those who talked with authority, because of their relationship with the Earth, through their rituals and their whole way of life. One of them said that they know how to treat the Earth with respect, but they are not respected by governments who build dams on their rivers,

encourage others to invade their land and fell the trees of the forest and who allow mining companies to dig up the land to extract fossil fuels and minerals.

I hope to write more about some of these sessions for another instalment! In the meantime, I invite you to look at the Minga Indigena page on the internet which shows you some of the representatives at COP 26. One of them said: *‘I not only brought with me the hearts and souls of my community... I have also brought the message that we are the solution to the problem.’*

There were a lot of young people in the Green Zone at any given time. Glasgow schools took the opportunity to bring their classes, who enjoyed playing on some of the installations in the Science Museum as well as taking part in some sessions and viewing exhibits.

Many young people were with Greta Thunberg on the streets trying to draw attention to the important decisions that needed to be made by the politicians and others in the Blue zone. I attended several sessions where young people were the main speakers. One was organised by the Welsh government and the Future Generations Ambassador (Wales is the only country that has one!) was present. Young people had a chance to divide into groups and give their opinions.



*Margaret with school children at COP*

These pictures show some Welsh youth and also local school children who received seeds to plant with a message in Welsh – some are holding the seeds in the photo.



There was an Eisteddfod chair in the centre of the floor (see photo) and at the end of the session the ambassador said that this chair was going to be placed in the office of the First Minister for Wales- Mark Drakeford, as a commitment of the Senedd to listen to the voices of young people and to the Earth.

People who had taken the time and energy to walk to COP 26 had a special message for the rest of us. One group had walked from London through the countryside and had camped at night, sharing stories and impressions around their campfire. They also brought messages from others they met.



They put their experience into a form of drama and song which they presented on the last day. This moved me, because they shared how they had changed on the way through listening to stories of the places they visited. They became closer to each other but even more committed to the cause of the Earth.



*Bishop John Arnold, Edwin (Maria's son) and Maria*

The big march was on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> November and that day about 100,000 walked through Glasgow. Some of the Catholic groups met for Mass in the Jesuit church (St. Aloysius). Jesuit volunteers arrived – having walked from Edinburgh (about 50 miles). We were given sustenance (sandwiches, cakes and tea) and high-viz jackets to identify us as we walked with the Faith contingent. Those who had walked from Edinburgh kept up their animation-singing along the way, to keep us moving. Maria and I held the Welsh flag from her school, which said (in Welsh) 'There is one Earth'.



### *Wales and Ireland meet!*

We walked part of the way with Ellen Teague (Justice and peace animator for the Columbans who produces 'Vocation for Justice' and Jo Siedlecka who publishes Independent Catholic News. Through her I met a Brazilian woman with Maria Elena from Cafod (see ICN for story). It was the only day it rained, but there was a great atmosphere of unity and hope as we walked for a common cause.

Another day, when I was looking after the Green Christian book stall, an excited crowd appeared outside the Church in Govan, where Green Christian had been given space for prayer and discussions. We heard that the puppet Storm was coming. She was huge and moved with the help of about 12 people. A brass band and two choirs welcomed her. We heard that she was going to meet Amal – the refugee puppet. The excitement was contagious so we joined the crowd and followed her. There was an opera singer who sang from a lorry along the way and then lots of schoolchildren with placards at the appointed meeting place. Amal appeared and came slowly to meet Storm. The crowd fell quiet and then gasped as Storm took Amal in her arms and embraced her. At that moment we wanted all that was going wrong in our world to be put right.



### **COP 26 - *From Margaret Lee***

It was with great pleasure and enjoyment that I was able to welcome Mary Jo, Veronica, Mary Kate and Maria here to Castlemilk. I was sorry that due to the Covid restrictions in Ireland Ellen was unable to attend.

Glasgow had been preparing for many months for this great occasion and great it was.

The day before the meetings began there was a **Multi Faith Vigil in George Square** which I attended with Mary Jo and Veronica. It was amazing to see so many faith groups in the heart of Glasgow. It was interesting to see that Veronica was recognised by quite a few who were delighted to see her.



During the first week the weather was dry and bright however on Saturday, the day of the march, the heavens opened and it poured non-stop. However, it did not dampen the spirits of all those who, after the Mass, walked from St Aloysius to Glasgow Green. I was at the Mass with Mary Jo and Maria.

One of the presentations which had an impact on me was **“Creating youth led solutions – tackling climate change crisis”**. It was launched by the YMCA in 2019. We saw the premiere of a documentary which had been commissioned by the YMCA Scotland. The young people were present and then spoke about the projects which were featured in the film. The documentary showed young leaders around the world using their innovative skills.



In Peru the project involved filling plastic bottles with **waste plastic making eco bricks** which were used to build walls to construct a sanitation block giving people dignity. In Zambia we saw young people using disused paper and card to make bags for school also lampshades.



We also heard from Hawaii. The young lady spoke of **unknown flooding** in her area. Unfortunately, I do not remember the project the young man from Kosovo spoke about.

Another powerful presentation was listening to the **young indigenous people speak about their life**. It was a powerful presentation. I think Mary Jo has written about that.



## **COP 26 Part 2 - from Mary Jo**

I want to share more about the Indigenous people that had a strong voice at Cop 26 – even though the Government representatives did not listen too well to them! The Minga Indígena, a civil society organization born in the Andes, brought Indigenous leaders—youth and elders— from all over the world, to COP 26, where they presented the first chapter of the docu-series **“Learning To Be Human”**. There is a video of the session which took place on the last day of the COP. In it the first speaker says that his ancestors, when they prayed, saw a time when his people and the white man would have to come together to address a common problem and key to this convergence would be returning to their original inspirations about our sacred relationship with our Mother Earth and all that surrounds us.

*‘So here we are – all the colours of the rainbow, all differences united. Our spirits have come together, transcending the differences created by modern colonialism. We are united in one heart to forge a new way forward, acknowledging each other, knowing who we are and where we are going.’*

Then there is a showing of the film 'Learning to be Human' which is their presentation of their declaration – made with the help of the groups that have supported them in this work.

I think if you watch the whole video of the session (which begins with two of the women leaders giving a blessing 13 minutes into the video) you will be moved as much as I was when I was present, but it takes 90 minutes, so if you haven't time, please watch the film 'Learning to be Human' which begins 27 mins into the video and lasts 20 minutes. After the film there are representatives from different countries talking about their own realities. The second representative is a young woman from Brazil and is speaking in Portuguese. The others mainly speak in Spanish but there is oral translation into English throughout. The link to the session on You tube is below.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4nt7MUahOc>

Most of the indigenous people who spoke at various sessions were very concerned about the threats to their way of life which depends on the land and rivers. There were examples of building dams which dried up their rivers (e.g. the Belo Monte dam in Pará, Brazil. Watch the You tube video 'Damocracy'!).

This is ecocide – and also genocide of the tribes affected. One of them said, *'When the river dries up, we suffer, but you suffer too. It destroys the place of the spirits. The river is where the children play freely. It affects our whole culture.'* They also talked about the damage done by mining. I remembered meeting the people who lost their homes and livelihoods because of bad mining practices where tailings dam bursts poisoned the land and rivers for hundreds of miles (Brumadinho and Mariana). In one of the sessions someone from the floor reminded us that Europe over-consumes and hosts companies with questionable practices in poorer countries. *'We have choices! What changes us is not government decisions, but our spirituality, contemplation of nature around us, with love.'* In another session one of the indigenous women said, *'We don't want you to feel sorry for us but to discover what your government is doing. What are the multinational companies doing? We ask for justice – justice for our children -and yours. We want to live in peace. We are guardians of the Forest – not just for us- it is for your sake too.'*



### Indigenous languages – Living Language Land project.

I found this session fascinating, as 25 words relating to the land from different languages were presented. Each person told a story from their land- often related to their mothers or grandmothers – about the deep significance of the word and how important it was to their culture, where they felt in close contact with the earth. The idea behind the project was that they hoped to promote a shift in thinking about the climate crisis to focus on humanity's integration with and dependency on the natural world. Neville Gabie from Gloucestershire said, *"The conversations in Cop26 are dominated by a western notion of how we address climate change. We're trying*



*to say part of the solution is a change of thinking, which can be inspired by other communities who have lived with nature in a very different way to our own. It's opening ourselves to those different voices,*

*that different conversation, and a different dialogue with nature and the environment that I think is so vital and necessary.”* The word chosen from Scots Gaelic was aibidil – alphabet, which has its roots in the tree-like script of Ogham. Each letter of the alphabet was based on a different tree. Another word I liked was the word tshinanu, from the Innu language Nehluen, spoken in the Quebec province of Canada that means an all-inclusive “we – all as equals”.

<https://living-language-land.org/>

*One group of walkers had collected patches with messages for Cop 26 on their journey and sewn them on to this coat. They demonstrated outside the Blue Zone and invited participants to put on the coat as a commitment to these proposals*

## **Coastal wetlands – mangroves and salt marshes.**

I went to this session, knowing that it was necessary to preserve mangroves as a way of combatting climate change and thinking of the importance of the mangrove areas in Bangladesh, where I had heard that the government was wanting to build power stations in a large mangrove area. It was only when I saw some of the pictures of mangroves that I remembered that the first place where we lived in Brazil, Santa Rita, was ‘mangue’ (mangrove). There, many of the houses were on stilts and all the rubbish collected in Vitória was deposited, to stop the tidal water coming in. The other realisation I had was that there was a salt marsh in Llanfairfechan – by the coastal path, which is a bird sanctuary. We heard about work done in Hull and projects in the Maldives, to preserve salt marshes and what a difference that makes to the climate. Many salt marshes have been lost because of building along the coast. I realise now the importance of knowing our local area and understanding what is happening there – especially if changes are proposed.

(See Wetlands International - [wetlands.org/cop26](http://wetlands.org/cop26))



At the Climate March, I met CAFOD partner Claudelice Silva dos Santos, walking alongside Maria Elena Arana of CAFOD. ‘A land defender from Pará, in the Brazilian Amazon, Claudelice has experienced intimidation and violence first-hand. Her brother and sister-in-law were murdered 10 years ago for their resistance to illegal logging. She describes going through days when, “I couldn’t even get out of bed for fear of being shot because of the death threats I was getting.” And yet she can say, “I overcame all this because we believe change is possible.”

*Picture and text, courtesy of Independent Catholic News*