

Nine cases aired in nature rights tribunal

Elise D. García | Jan. 21, 2014 Eco Catholic
QUITO, ECUADOR

Late Thursday, members of the [Global Alliance for Rights of Nature](#) [1] left Otavalo and boarded two buses headed to Quito for the summit's final event — the historic opening of the World Tribunal on Rights of Nature.

Some 200 students, journalists, indigenous peoples, activists and researchers attended the daylong mock trial on Friday, presided by a 10-member international panel of judges headed by physicist Vandana Shiva of India. Other panel members included lawyers from Argentina, Ecuador and South Africa; indigenous leaders from North America and Ecuador; a former Ecuadorean minister; an aboriginal Canadian actress; an Iranian-American defender of the rainforest; and a Maryknoll sister and human rights activist.

Ecuadorean law professor Ramiro Ávila served as prosecutor, seeking the admissibility, under the 2010 [Universal Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth](#) [2], of nine cases, including one in Ecuador involving the imprisonment of defenders of rights of nature.

Ávila called on expert witnesses, who presented evidence of "violations of and crimes against rights of nature" in the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* (BP) oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico; the practice of fracking in the United States; the decades long oil contamination in Ecuador's rainforest by Chevron; megaton coal production near Australia's Great Barrier Reef; Ecuador's broken Yasuní-ITT agreement; massive copper mining in the Amazon; genetic modification of crops around the world; and government and corporate actions blocking action on global climate change.

Carlos Pérez of Ecuador presented the case of his own imprisonment for protecting water as emblematic of the criminalization of defending nature.

The cumulative impact of the evidence was at once numbing and terrifying.

In presenting the threat to the Great Barrier Reef of accelerated coal extraction in Queensland, attorney Michelle Maloney of the [Australian Earth Laws Alliance](#) [3] stepped into the voice of the reef, describing herself [it] as millions of years old, visible from outer space and teeming with life.

At the end, she asked how a reef feels in the face of threats to life. Her answer: "Same as the humans who love and care for it" — frightened.

"We are frightened that something precious and irreplaceable" — will die."

The tribunal ruled the cases admissible for full consideration later this year, in Peru, when a similarly constituted ethical body will be convened as part of the new — and permanent — World Tribunal for Rights of Nature.

[Adrian Dominican Sr. Elise D. García, is the former co-director of [Santuario Sisterfarm](#) [4], an ecology center

in the Texas Hill Country dedicated to cultivating cultural and biological diversity. She attended the [Global Rights of Nature summit](#) [5] and [blogged](#) [6] about it for *NCR* last week.]

Editor's Note: The *National Catholic Reporter* is embarking on a groundbreaking project to give greater voice to sisters around the world. To learn more about this project or sign up for email alerts visit, <http://ncronline.org/sisters> [7].

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[1] <http://therightsofnature.org/universal-declaration/%5d>

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[3] <http://www.earthlaws.org.au/>

[4] <http://www.sisterfarm.org/>

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