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# #SinodoAmazonico – Press Conference to present the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Amazonia Region: new paths for the Church and for integral ecology

**Intervention by His Eminence Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri**

**Intervention by His Eminence Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, O.F.M.**

**Intervention of Bishop Fabio Fabene**

At 11.30 this morning, in the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region, taking place in the Vatican's New Synod Hall from 6 to 27 October 2019, on the theme: *Amazonia: new paths for the Church and for integral ecology*.

The speakers in the conference were: His Eminence Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, general secretary of the Synod of Bishops; His Eminence Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, O.F.M., archbishop emeritus of São Paulo, president of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM), general rapporteur; and Bishop Fabio Fabene, under-secretary of the Synod of Bishops.

The following are their respective interventions:

## Intervention by His Eminence Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri

Good morning to you all.

I warmly greet all of you participating in this Press Conference on the eve of the upcoming *Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* on the theme *Amazonia: new paths for the Church and for integral ecology*, to take place

from 6 to 27 of this month.

I see many of you again after just over three months. Indeed, on 17 June in this Hall the presentation of the *Instrumentum Laboris* of this Synod was held. As you are aware, it is substantially the collation and organization by subject of the material produced during the Consultation Phase, in listening to all the members of the People of God interested in the theme. It is offered to the Synod Fathers as a point of reference for discussion during the work of the Synod Assembly.

The Special Assembly is a type of Synod convened to discuss "*matters … which pertain principally to one or more particular geographical areas*" (Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio* Art. 1, 3°). But even if attention is focused on a specific territory, each Synod always and in any case relates to the universal Church. Therefore, the meeting phase is taking place in Rome, See of the Successor of Peter, and not in a place in the Pan-Amazon region.

All the ordinary and auxiliary bishops of the Amazonian ecclesiastical circumscriptions or those with an Amazonian territory, and the presidents of the Episcopal Conferences concerned, will participate in this Assembly. Therefore, unlike the ordinary and extraordinary General Assemblies, this is not a partial representation of the bishops. All the prelates of the Region are convened, thus highlighting collegiality, a peculiar characteristic of the synodal institution.

There are also Prelates from other particular Churches and regional or continental ecclesial bodies, as well as heads of dicasteries of the Roman Curia who have some competence in this area. Their participation also highlights the link between the Special Assembly and the universal Church. It is the whole Church that shows her concern for the Amazon: for the difficulties, problems, concerns and challenges that are encountered there, but also by being ready to accept the contribution to a better existence that can come from it.

There are 184 Synod Fathers, of whom 136 participate are participating *ex officio*; among these, 113 are from the various ecclesiastical circumscriptions of the Pan-Amazon region. There are 13 heads of dicasteries of the Roman Curia. The total number also includes the members of the Pre-Synodal Council, 15 religious elected by the Union of Superiors General and 33 members appointed by the Pope.

Among the Synod Fathers there are 28 cardinals, 29 archbishops, 62 residential bishops, 7 auxiliaries, 27 vicars apostolic, 10 prelate bishops, and 21 non-bishop members, diocesan and religious.

The Pan-Amazon region, as is well known, occupies a territory of nine countries (French Guyana, the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, Surinam, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Bolivia, and Peru). For this reason, the *ex officio* Synod Fathers belong to 7 Episcopal Conferences: Antilles, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Bolivia and Peru. Thus, among the 113 Synod Fathers of the Pan-Amazon ecclesiastical circumscriptions, 3 come from the Antilles, 6 from Venezuela, 13 from Colombia, 7 from Ecuador, 57 from Brazil, 11 from Bolivia and 10 from Peru.

The universal dimension of the Church is also expressed by the 33 members appointed by the Pope, who come especially from countries and geographical areas, such as the river basin of Congo, which present the same ecological problems that constitute one of the two major areas mentioned in the title of the Synod.

The Synod is attended by 6 fraternal delegates, representing other Churches and ecclesial communities present in the Amazon territory, whose presence nurtures in us the desire to achieve the full visible unity of the Church of Christ and strengthens the will to work together, certain that the Holy Spirit is at work, and suggests new paths for the proclamation and witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Of particular importance is also the presence of 12 fraternal delegates, the highest number so far among the participants in a Special Assembly. They have been chosen for their high level of scientific competence or as members of bodies that in various ways carry out activities of a humanitarian nature or aimed at protecting the

environment.

The number of participants is supplemented by 25 experts, appointed for their specific skills in various fields. They will collaborate with the general rapporteur and the special secretaries on the issues that will be considered.

There are 55 auditors, including specialists and pastoral workers, the majority of whom come from the Pan-Amazon region, even from the remotest places. In this group there are 10 religious presented by the International Union of Superiors General (U.I.S.G.). The total number of religious is higher than that of the other Synods, testifying to their pastoral and missionary importance.

Among the various participants in the Synod, there are also 17 representatives of different original peoples and indigenous ethnic groups, including 9 women. They bear the voice and the living witness of the traditions, culture and faith of their people and help to provide awareness of the situation in the Pan-Amazon region that is as responsive as possible to the local reality.

The total number of women participating in the Synod is 35: 2 are special guests, 4 are experts (of whom 2 are nuns) and 29 auditors (of whom 18 are nuns).

As shown by the title, the focus of this Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazon region is dual, and was precisely indicated by the Holy Father at the moment of its convocation. Its purpose is to "*identify new paths for the evangelization of this segment of the People of God, especially the indigenous peoples, often forgotten and without the prospect of a peaceful future, also due to the crisis of the Amazon rainforest, the lungs of paramount importance for our planet*" (Francis, *Angelus*, 15 October 2017).

Attention is therefore focused on the evangelizing mission of the Church in the Amazon, with the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ at its centre, and on the ecological theme, given the importance that the Amazon territory has for the whole planet. As far as this second aspect is concerned, the approach starts from the vision of an ecology that does not limit itself to dealing with issues looking exclusively at the natural environment, but which "clearly respects its human and social dimensions" (*LS* 137). An ecology, therefore, that knows how to keep in mind the essence of the human, as stated in LS 11. "Everything is connected", Pope Francis often emphasizes. It is necessary to be aware that human action is not exercised in "hermetically sealed compartments", but that any behaviour, positive or negative, that is adopted with regard to the natural environment has inevitable consequences also in the socio-cultural and spiritual sphere of peoples and individuals. For this reason, the defence of the earth, the defence of cultures and the defence of life are inextricably intertwined, as Pope Francis said during his meeting in Puerto Maldonado with the peoples of the Amazon on 19 January 2018, a meeting that we can say paved the way for the entire synodal path. The same ways of proclaiming the Gospel cannot ignore the relationship with nature, cultures and societies in which it takes place.

Bearing in mind that one of the Synod's thematic axes revolves around ecological issues, the General Secretariat has promoted a number of initiatives with the aim of limiting pollution and promoting environmental sustainability, so as to contribute, as far as possible, to safeguarding the common home. I will briefly mention these.

The first, in chronological order, concerns the registration of participants. A procedure has been adopted whereby registrations is carried out directly online. This new procedure has speeded up communication, but above all it has allowed considerable savings in printed paper, eliminating, moreover, the costs associated with the use of traditional mail.

Particular attention is also paid to limiting the use of plastic as much as possible. For this reason, for example,

- the glasses to be used will be made of biodegradable material;

- the bag with the work material to be delivered to the Participants is made of natural fibre

- the paper used for the documents to be distributed has the highest number of certifications regarding origin and processing chain.

It is hoped that the Synod may respond to what has been stated in its title, to identify new paths to promote, in Amazonia, the proclamation of Jesus Christ, Redeemer of all men, and to indicate feasible ways to safeguard and care for the natural, human and social environment.

I thank you all for your attention, not only to this intervention of mine, but more generally to an event that affects the life of the Church and the Amazon people in this month of October.

Intervention by His Eminence Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, O.F.M.

The Special Synod of Bishops for Amazonia, which will begin on 6 October here in the Vatican, convened by Pope Francis, has as its theme “Amazonia: new paths for the Church and for integral ecology”. The broad context of the Synod is the serious and urgent socio-environmental crisis to which *Laudato si'* refers: a) the climate crisis, that is, global warming due to the greenhouse effect; b) the ecological crisis as a consequence of the degradation, contamination, depredation and devastation of the planet, especially in Amazonia; c) and the growing social crisis of blatant poverty and misery that affects most human beings and, in Amazonia, especially the indigenous, the riverine, small farmers and those who live on the outskirts of Amazonian cities and others. But *Laudato si'* warns: “Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*” (49). “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature”. (139). Everything is interconnected.

Already in the announcement of the Synod in October 2017, Pope Francis indicated fundamental points of this Synod, that is, in Amazonia, “identify new paths for the evangelization of this segment of the People of God, especially the indigenous peoples, often forgotten and without the prospect of a peaceful future, also due to the crisis of the Amazon rainforest, the lungs of paramount importance for our planet”. Therefore, great themes: new paths, evangelization, indigenous people and the forest. All this is summarized in the current theme of the Synod: “Amazonia: new paths for the Church and for integral ecology".

It deals with the mission of the Church in Amazonia: to evangelize, that is, to proclaim Jesus Christ and His Kingdom and consequently to care for the “common home”. Basically, it is a matter of caring for and defending life, both for all human beings, especially the indigenous people who live there, and for biodiversity. Jesus said: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (*Jn* 10: 10).

In this context, what Pope Francis calls “integral ecology” is important, to say that everything is interconnected: human beings, community and social life, and nature. What is done to the earth as evil ends up doing harm to human beings and vice versa. There is a need for an ecological conversion, inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi. As the Pope says in *Laudato si'*,

“a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion” (218). “First, it entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God’s loving gift. ... It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion” (220); it “[enriches] the meaning of this conversion… [including] the awareness that each creature reflects something of God and has a message to convey to us, and the security that Christ has taken unto Himself this material world and now, risen, is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with His affection

and penetrating it with His light. Then too, there is the recognition that God created the world" (221).

Intervention by Bishop Fabio Fabene

The Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* provides for the preparatory phase as the first stage of the synodal journey. On the occasion of the presentation of the *Instrumentum laboris*, which concludes this phase, the initiatives that led to the drafting of the document were presented. This was followed by a period of in-depth study of the *Instrumentum laboris* through a series of activities carried out in various places, including through the competent episcopal bodies. I would like to remind you of some of them: the Pre-Synodal Assemblies on the *Instrumentum laboris* in the various Episcopal Conferences, the REPAM Theological Symposium, held in Rome at the end of June, the meeting of the itinerant teams in Manaus, Brazil, and numerous virtual seminars and local meetings. Particularly significant was the meeting on the Amazonian Synod that CELAM held in Colombia on 6 and 7 September last. Some of you may have participated in some of the visits to the Amazon territories organized for journalists.

The synodal journey was accompanied by the prayers of all those involved. In particular, the initiative "40 days across the river. Sailing together. The good news of God towards the Amazonian Synod". A journey of listening to the Word of God and of prayer, spread also via social networks.

We are now on the eve of the beginning of the celebratory phase, which is the true and proper Synod. Bearing in mind that we are facing a Special Assembly, the work will follow a methodology that, compared to the previous Synods, has been partially renewed in order to deal more systematically with the specific nature of the topics to be dealt with. The work will be introduced by a report by the General Secretary, to illustrate the synodal path. This will be followed by the report by the General Rapporteur, who will present the contents that emerged during the preparatory phase and outline the main topics for discussion in the Hall and in the *Circoli minori*. The triple division of the parts in *see-judge-act* will not be followed, but this method will be found in the various themes under discussion. The speeches in the Hall of the Synod Fathers, of the Auditors, of the Fraternal Delegates and of the Special Guests will last four minutes. At the end of the days on which the General Congregations are held there will be time for the free interventions by the Synod Fathers.

The *Circoli minori* will present their contributions which, together with the interventions in the Hall, will allow the General Rapporteur, assisted by the Special Secretaries, to prepare the first plan for the Final Document of the Synod. After this has been submitted to the Hall, they will propose amendments for the final draft, which will be voted on by the Assembly.

Communication during the Synod is entrusted to the Dicastery of Communication. Every day there will be briefings coordinated by the Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication and the Director of the Holy See Press Office. As in the past, some of the Synod Fathers and other participants in the Special Assembly will intervene daily. The social networks (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) of *Vatican News* and the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops will contribute to the dissemination of news on the synodal work. The hashtag *#SinodoAmazonico* will also be active in several languages in order to provide adequate information on the Synod.

The Synod Fathers will be able to give personal interviews outside the Synod Hall.

As in the last Synods, the interventions in the Hall will not be officially published in the Holy See Press Office Bulletin. Instead, the reports of the *Circoli* will be made public via the Holy See Press Office.