

RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENTALLY-INDUCED DISPLACEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

A project of American University's Center for Latin American and Latino Studies

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The Center for Latin American and Latino Studies (CLALS) at American University (AU) is undertaking a three-year program of workshops, research, publication, and engagement with stakeholders, dedicated to improving understanding of the relationship between religion and environmental displacement. Previous Center projects on religious approaches to environmental conflict and climate change, in contemporary Latin America and elsewhere, examined religious participation in public discourse and policy on environmental issues, including religious sources of environmental knowledge, religion's role in local, national and transnational environmental advocacy, as well as religion's influence in helping to articulate new forms of social justice. A major component of this work considered how religious knowledge informs local and community responses to environmental change.

In our current phase of work, we seek to extend these analytic dimensions in understanding intersections of religion with the environment, but now bringing them together with our Center's ongoing attention to the sources and impacts of migration in Latin America. In so doing, we are exploring relationships between two forms of religious advocacy in the Americas, on behalf of migrants and the environment. This project seeks to better understand religion's role at each phase of environmental migration, from departure or displacement, during transit, to arrival and adaptation. It examines how different religious traditions inform individual and community responses to environmental dislocations, including Christian, but also indigenous and Afro-Latino religious beliefs and practice. This project also explores the potential of religious voices and ideas for bringing greater public attention to solving the legal challenges now faced by environmental migrants.

We are pursuing this agenda by focusing on the following interrelated dimensions of religious engagement with environmental displacement: 1. the contributions of faith-based actors and religious ideas to international and national discussions and emerging normative frameworks addressing new governance and security challenges posed by environmental migration; 2. the participation of transnational faith-based non-governmental organizations as part of humanitarian interventions on behalf of migrants; 3. the role of religion and churches in receiving communities for addressing the needs of migrants, especially regarding resettlement and societal integration; and 4. the ways religious engagement is well-positioned to ameliorate intangible and collective dimensions of environmental dislocations beyond just the material needs of individual migrants.