

Press Release: INSeCT Network Council Meeting July 16 – 20, 2014

Catholic theologians gathered in Brazil to participate in a global research congress on the power of theology to overcome abuses of power in church and society.

Leading Catholic theologians joined colleagues from 21 countries to take part in a global research congress on the power of theology in overcoming abuses of power in church and society. The congress was held in Belo Horizonte, Brazil between the 16th and 20th July 2014. The discussions formed part of the triennial Congress of the International Network of Societies of Catholic Theology.

Among the international keynote speakers at the event, held in the light of Pope Francis's call for a renewal and reform of the Church's mission, were the Very Rev. **Dr Friedrich Bechina** of the Congregation for Catholic Education (Holy See) and Irish Columban missionary Father Peter Hughes, Executive Secretary of the Latin American Bishops' Justice and Solidarity Department.

"We chose the theme of the power of theology in overcoming abuses of power in Church and society back in 2011," said Rev. **Professor Eamonn Conway**, who is immediate past-President of the International Network.

"Little did we know then that we would have a new Pope and that the Congress would be held in the light of his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* –The Joy of the Gospel – which provides a renewed sense of vision for our deliberations, particularly when it comes to the Church being a true world-Church in a secularised world made up of numerous and complex elements.

"Pope Francis encourages us to get out of our comfort zones and be a Church which must go forth to everyone without exception. He calls us all to be missionary disciples, a people for everyone abandoning the attitude of we have always done it this way. We are, in effect, being challenged to re-imagine our ministry.

"Throughout the Congress we considered how theology can overcome abuses of power in Church and Society. *Evangelii Gaudium* provides a contemporary and challenging reference point for that discussion, one that resonates in many countries right around the world, particularly those where we are working towards healing the hurts of the past and rediscovering and celebrating the joy of the Gospel."

The Very Rev. Dr Friedrich Bechina of the Congregation for Catholic Education (Holy See) briefed delegates on important new international developments and initiatives in Catholic Higher Education saying that higher education institutions play a critical role in the mission of the Church.

"Around 700 faculties, specialist stand-alone or affiliated institutes of theology, philosophy, canon law as well as other more specialised ecclesiastical studies such as sacred music, archaeology or social communications make an ever more important contribution to the mission of the Church, and also to the world of Universities and society at large," said The Very Rev. Dr Friedrich Bechina.

"This important work will always be carried out within the tension between the necessary rootedness within the Church, the responsibility for the faith of the faithful and the enterprise

of exploring new answers to the question of our present time, drawing from the rich source of wisdom of the Gospel and the Catholic tradition.”

Irish Columban missionary Father **Peter Hughes**, Executive Secretary of the Latin American Bishops’ Justice and Solidarity Department, spoke about an exciting new concept for mission that has emerged through challenging the impact of extractive industries in the Amazon region. He also presented a report on the co-operative initiatives of the US, Canadian and Latin American bishops through the work of the *Comisión Interamericana* for Human Rights.

“On his visit to Brazil last year Pope Francis implored the Church to assume its responsibility and play its part in saving the Amazon region,” said Father Peter Hughes.

“The Amazon region is a huge area under immense pressure because of destruction caused to the rain forest and the rights of indigenous peoples to their lands and cultures which are being destroyed by the onslaught of mining, timber and hydro-electric dam mega projects.

“Already 19% of the area has been destroyed and the remainder is in jeopardy which has serious consequences not just for the Amazon people or the people of Brazil, but for the entire world as the Amazon region plays a key role in the struggle against global warming and climate change.

“Pope Francis has called on Christians, in virtue of their baptism, to become involved in a courageous and decisive way in the struggle to save the Amazon. Each and every one of us has a role to play whether it be challenging the mega projects directly, lobbying for the rights of the Amazon people to be respected or being responsible about our consumption of energy and other raw materials.”

In an unprecedented act of global solidarity, Irish Catholics have raised \$50,000 to provide 25 theologians and scholars from developing countries with a grant towards their travel costs enabling them to take part in this important discussion.

“I would like to thank the very many people and organizations who have joined together to support us in enabling theologians and scholars from Africa, Asia and Latin America to attend the Congress. We are a truly international network and the generosity of donors means that a lack of resources is not preventing delegates from many countries less well off than our own from attending,” Professor Conway continued.

Congress delegates also participated in the annual congress of the Sociedade de Teologia e Ciências da Religião (The Brazilian Catholic Theology Society) which took place at the Minas Pontifical University in Belo Horizonte.

The Congress Patron was the **Archbishop of Belo Horizonte, Walmor Oliveira de Azevedo** and the organising committee was led by the Network’s **President Rev. Professor Eamonn Conway, Vice Presidents Profs Catherine Clifford (Ottawa), Valmor da Silva (Goias, Brazil) and incoming Vice-President Nancy Pinena-Madrid (Boston).**