

Huancavelica. The Second International Conference of Young Environmentalists through the eyes of one Young Adult Volunteer of the PCUSA.

Youth from the United States, Bolivia and several regions of Peru came together to participate in the II International Congress of Young Environmentalists. To understand the experience lived out by these young people we asked Michael Sinkler, Young Adult Volunteer of the PCUSA, working with the NGO El Día Del Pueblo, what he thought of the Congress.

“The Second Annual Congress of Young Environmentalists was held this year during the week of January 26 - 30 in the city of Huancavelica, Peru. Youth from Peru, Bolivia, and the United States were in attendance and several presentations were given on a variety of topics pertaining to environmental issues. The main focus of the week seemed to be on the ways in which water is used by communities and mistreated by mining and other companies. There was also a forum held in order to discuss possible solutions to the problems facing the Huancavelica and Ica regions over their dispute surrounding the water that is being diverted out of Huancavelica and into Ica for irrigation purposes.”



“I was privileged to be invited to the Congress and was very impressed by a number of the presentations given by the youth from each of the three participating countries. I was interested to learn that Bolivia, like Peru, is dealing with a number of environmental problems relating to water as well as problems related to ongoing mining operations in that country. The issues facing the residents of Lomas de Carabayllo in the Northern limits of Lima are also incredible. There the citizens have no access to running water and instead must depend on a water truck to deliver them so called “potable” water which they store in large drums outside of their homes. I learned that the water is oftentimes of a lesser quality than what the majority of Limeños receive. In addition, there exist large landfills all around the area where people are living in Lomas. Trash trucks carrying plastic bottles, cardboard, glass, etc. come to the area to dump the trash which is then sorted out by residents, often children, of the Lomas for wages equalling little more than one dollar per day. The toxic gases given off by these areas pollute the homes of the people who live nearby as well as the pigs that are often kept in pens in the landfill. This further poisons the population as they are eating pork that is contaminated by these toxic waste dumps. Government intervention is needed to help change Lomas for the better and currently there are marches and other forms of protest going on in the district. However, awareness and advocacy are two major factors required if anything serious is to be done to change the conditions of living in Lomas de Carabayllo.”



“Aside from the presentations, members of the Congress were invited to witness a few very interesting traditions from the local citizens of Huancavelica. We witnessed a Wamanis tradition in which elders from the town gathered us on a hillside to pay tribute to the surrounding hills as well as to ask that the Congress be a success. We chewed cocoa leaves while a white powder was thrown into the crowd followed by a wet paste mixture. This process was repeated for a few minutes while many words were spoken in the native Quechua tongue.”

“The Congress concluded with a cultural night in which members from each of the three participating countries presented songs and dances native to their country. Everyone enjoyed this time together and I believe we all learned a great deal from one another. Upon leaving the Congress I felt much more informed of the environmental issues facing Peru, Bolivia, and the United States as well as concerned for the future of our planet.”

“I hope that this Congress is able to grow into the future, expanding the number of participating countries and environmental themes. It has and will continue to serve as an excellent platform on which to promote awareness and increase people’s knowledge surrounding a variety of environmental topics.”

Michael Sinklier
PCUSA Young Adult Volunteer