

Dialogue on Life and Mining

Open letter from religious and lay stewards of the goods of creation in Latin America

We are religious and lay men and women from Latin America moved by the critical situation of our peoples vis-à-vis the extractive industry—they are impacted day after day by the destruction of Creation, by the indiscriminate exploitation of common goods, and by the repression and exclusion that causes social conflicts, infringes human rights, and destroys vital ecosystems.

We seek to develop joint strategies to respond to this complex reality, illuminated by the Gospel.

In November 2013 we met in Lima as an exploratory group. This initiative emerged out of the concrete experiences of those who are working where there is conflict over extractive projects.

In Peru, which is the Latin American country with the best economic-development indicators, the Ombudsman's Office has reported that mining is the principle source of social conflict. In all of our countries extractivism is source of constant and serious conflicts.

A total of thirty people attended the meeting, from El Salvador, Honduras, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and also religious and lay representatives from international agencies including VIVAT International, Franciscans International, Mercy International (NGOs of different religious congregations at the UN) and the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation office of the OFM Franciscans in Rome. The process was supported and accompanied by Misereor, the development agency of the Catholic Church in Germany.

In recent years, the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), several dioceses and conferences of Catholic bishops, as well as the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) have explored and discussed the conflicts caused by large-scale mining and energy-related projects in our countries.

Christian communities, in many cases, have played key roles in resisting these projects, in the defense of rights and local traditions and in search of alternatives to this developmentist and plundering model stemming from colonialism.

These grassroots Christian organizations felt the need to revive the network among themselves and the institutional Church in an ecumenical spirit.

The context is extremely challenging: Christian leaders pastors that defend communities, the environment, and workers from the impact of mining are increasingly criminalized and persecuted, they find themselves isolated and sometimes without the support of church institutions or the congregations to which they belong. Several catechists, sisters, priests and pastors have been murdered, threatened or removed from the communities with whom they lived and struggled.

Indigenous or traditional peoples are the most affected by large-scale extractive projects. They suffer negative health impacts; their traditional territories are devastated, their cultures and spiritualities are threatened.

We are concerned about the attacks on the rights of indigenous people, which have been so arduously earned over the last decades, under pressure from mining companies. Native peoples are not being respected in what concerns their right to veto the construction of large-scale hydroelectric or mineral exploration on the territories that belong to their ancestors.

Given this concerning panorama, there is a deep need to strengthen the alliances among those who have taken up the Christian mission to care for Creation, including strengthening the dialogue with the hierarchies of our churches. We were very happy to have the Brazilian bishop Monsignor Guilherme Werlang¹ participating in the Lima meeting, as well as the support that Pope Francis expressed for the struggle against large-scale mining² in a recent meeting in Rome. These are important signs for the future.

During this first meeting in Lima, we identified some shared work and strategies for the future:

- We want to contribute to a biblical and theological re-reading of the fundamental principles of the Christian commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC). We wish to deepen the relationship between the sacred values of the traditions of our peoples, the culture of '*Buen Vivir*' (*Good Living*) and the Christian message, in a common commitment to defend life. We will work to incorporate these themes in the popular education of Christian communities.
- We want to dialogue with the institutional Catholic Church, with networks of evangelical churches, and with the leaders of our religious congregations. We will seek to strengthen our dialogue with CLAI and to promote a gathering for reflection and retreat in which representatives of the communities affected by mining may call on the Vatican to protect and defend their rights and ways of life.
- We wish to build bridges among affected communities and international institutions working to defend human rights, via the mission of religious congregations working at the United Nations, the JPIC leadership at the national and international level, and in international networks in the struggle against the impacts of mining.

To this end, we invite religious men and women and lay leaders of Latin America who are conscious of this urgency and willing to commit to the defense of communities affected by mining to join in the ongoing discussion of these points.

We want to meet again in Brazil toward the end of 2014 to reaffirm these and new commitments, together with a larger and more connected group, so that our peoples feel the churches by their side and so that everything, in them, can have life in abundance.

Lima, November 4-5, 2013

Ofelia Vargas – Peru – Grufides

Pablo Sanchez – Peru – Grufides

Juan Goicochea – Peru – Comboni Missionaries

René Flores – Honduras – Franciscan Order of Friars Minor

César Espinoza – Honduras – Claretian Missionaries

¹ President of the Brazilian Episcopal Commission for the Service of Charity, Justice, and Peace.

² See <http://www.ejolt.org/2013/11/the-pope-says-no-to-fracking-and-that-water-is-worth-more-than-gold/>.

Donald Hernandez – Honduras – CEPRODEH
Filomeno Ceja – Guatemala – Comboni Missionaries
Juan de La Cruz - Ecuador - Salesians
Dário Bossi – Brazil – Comboni Missionaries
Danilo Chammas – Brazil – Justiça nos Trilhos
Rodrigo Peret – Brazil – Franciscan Order of Friars Minor
Gilberto Pauwels – Bolivia – Oblates of Immaculate Mary
Adriel Ruiz – Colombia – Diocesan priest
Cesar Correa – Chile – Columban’s Missionaries
César Padilla – Chile – OCMAL
Ana Maria Siufi – Argentina – Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Fábio Ferreira – Rome – Franciscan Order of Friars Minor
Jean Paul Pezzi – USA – Comboni Missionaries
Seamus Finn – USA – Oblates of Immaculate Mary
Amanda Lyons – USA – Franciscans International
Aine O'Connor – USA – Sisters of Mercy, Mercy International Association at the UN
Zélia Cordeiro - USA – Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit/VIVAT International

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