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“Politicians of all faiths should support corporate accountability, not fight it”



*Credit cover photo: Guilherme Cavalli*

Negotiations on the EU's Corporate Sustainable Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) are reaching their final stage, after the recent vote of the European Parliament's report.

The proposed directive has been hailed by civil society as a potential game-changer for a fairer and more sustainable global economy, yet a substantial section of the centre and rightwing political parties and (a minority of) businesses denounced it as bureaucratic red tape that would stunt the EU economy.

Many of the former often appeal to religious values, in stark contrast with an increasing number of religious leaders who see protecting the environment from corporate damage as a crucial task for modern churches and faith groups.

Ahead of the second political trilogue between the Commission, the Parliament and the Council of the EU, CIDSE - the international family of Catholic social justice organisations - released a [statement](#) signed by over 150 faith leaders worldwide calling on EU lawmakers to adopt a strong law holding companies accountable for damaging the environment and abusing human rights.

This is not the first time that religious leaders have spoken in favour of mandatory laws to prevent and remedy corporate abuses: in 2020, more than [230 Catholic Bishops signed a statement](#) to ask for what would have become the draft law.

This time, the call includes Christian leaders of different faiths, both men and women. But why do faith leaders care about corporate accountability while a large part of the political class, who often has no qualms to engage rhetorical references to religious values, seems to be failing to grasp the seriousness of the problem?

Bearing witness

The reason may be in faith communities' proximity to victims of corporate harm and in their valuing our planet as a common home. Many faith leaders witness the brutal impacts on their communities of unregulated corporate activities.

When in 2019 a mining tailing dam certified safe by a European multinational company collapsed in Brumadinho, Brazil, killing hundreds and destroying the local environment, many people sought shelter and relief in local churches and with faith groups.

The local Bishop took action and offered the church as a sanctuary for the local community and victims of the disaster to [build solidarity](#) and [access immediate relief](#), in the aftermath of the disaster.

The bishop and his congregation stood with the community and criticised the actions of the Brazilian and German corporations involved in the disaster, with direct consequences for the security of the local church community.

In Mozambique when actions by European companies contributed and aggravated ongoing violence in Cabo Delgado causing massive displacement, the local bishop was one of the first to point out the [role of the extractive industries in local upheavals](#).

[Churches, mosques and other religions' gathering places](#) are often thriving community hubs.

Especially in the Global South, they are the place people tend to turn to when their livelihoods and their environment are threatened by corporate activities, to find comfort and to organise. Moreover, a faith-based world outlook allows us to see the earth as more than the sum of the parts from which profit can be extracted but rather as our common home to which we all belong and share a duty of care.

Part of our European political class lacks both proximity to those living the reality of corporate abuse and a view of the world that goes beyond profit-margins projections. The pushback against the CSDDD is another example of centrist and center-right politicians obstructing a law to protect communities that are affected or could be affected.

Indeed, the [recent conservative opposition to the proposal for a Nature Restoration Law](#), a law aimed at ending the catastrophic loss of wildlife and habitat in Europe at the time when our planet is in crisis, is another sign of such blindness.

The lack of proximity to communities and a utilitarian world-view can explain why politicians from countries like Germany, the largest economy in the European Union, would go to great lengths, both in the European Parliament and the inter-ministerial discussions, to reduce the scope and effectiveness of the EU CSDD directive and reduce protections from victims.

Or why France has been pushing to exclude financial institutions from the text, or deadly arms trade.

The ongoing trilogue offers the opportunity to politicians to show that their religious and moral values are not merely accessories to display just before election time. It is well past time that, as society, we seize the opportunity to do better. Let this call from faith leaders be the occasion for us to stand up for the values that unite us all through a real commitment to building an economy of solidarity and care for people and the planet.

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