



Meeting with Communities Affected by Mining in Latin America Brasilia, August 7-10, 2018

Public Letter to our churches, organizations and society

(Refer to the Spanish version of this document for references and end notes)

Called by the clamor of the earth and the victims of the wide extractive industry, inspired by the encyclical *Laudato Si'* and the Pastoral Letter on Integral Ecology, "Disciples and Missionaries, Custodians of Creation" of the Latin American Episcopal Council, we have met in Brasilia - diverse organizations, religious movements and families from various Latin American countries, the United States and Germany - to share challenges, struggles, dreams and hopes with the communities affected by mining in this continent.

This meeting has allowed us to renew our mission to contribute to building new relationships with nature, not as a producer of wealth, but as a sister and mother of ours with a life of its own and with inalienable rights, which shares and sustains the life of the Creation in search of *Bien Vivir* and well-being of all the beings that are part of this "Common Home".

We have shared with great pain the serious and often irreversible damages and violations of human rights and the rights of nature that the current extractivist mining model induces, sustained and fueled by the desire for immoral, inhuman and unnatural enrichment of large corporations, transnational mining companies and countries of origin, in a new, more aggressive phase of colonization and looting. Our peoples are condemned to a present and future of destruction and death. It is urgent to put limits to this model of extractive development, as Pope Francis has pointed out.

Alongside the destruction caused by mining must be added the privatization and damming (imprisonment) of our rivers, with the expansion of ventures of energy generation in a world that, far from applying technology to reduce consumption, increases it to maintain an unsustainable lifestyle for the nations with greater economic and political power. No less alarming is the growing and widely rejected initiative to implement the fracking for the extraction of natural gas.

All these types of extractivism, far from advancing a greater responsibility for the care for life and the Common Home, accelerate their destruction and condemn millions of people to precariously survive as victims of diseases derived from the pollution of water, soil and air. God and the Church, we welcome the poor with love, but we firmly reject the causes - the public and private actors that spread impoverishment, destruction and death by resisting profound and structural changes to the prevailing inhuman and savage capitalist system.

During the meeting, we had the opportunity to exchange with the victims of mining and with the defenders of our Sister and Mother Earth, confirming that Latin American governments are not exempt from responsibility in the serious human rights violations that are committed against humanity. On our continent, for example, 60% of the murders correspond to defenders and community leaders.

In our ears and in our hearts rings the heartrending cry for "help" from Don Ireneo, a resident of the Community of Santa Rita, Paracatu, Brazil, who carries in his body a high percentage of arsenic, as a result of pollution from the mine near his community. This cry of "help" rings with increasing force and frequency in our continent. Faced with this heartbreaking and overwhelming reality, we have been reminded by Pope Francis and the Latin American Episcopal Conference that we can not continue to respond as Cain: "Am I the guardian of my brother?"

The guidelines sent to us by both Monsignor Bruno-Marie Duffé (Secretary of the Dicastery for the Integral Human Development Service of the Vatican), as well as Cardinal Pedro Barreto Jimeno (Archbishop of Huancayo and Vice-president of REPAM), were fundamental to affirm that as churches we are called to give paths of faith and hope and reasons that another world is possible, a world where respect and care for the natural life of which humanity is a part resides. In this line:

- We reaffirm our commitment to denounce these death practices and to demand structural changes in the abusive, destructive and irresponsible ways of unbridled extractivism, and in the complicit tolerance of our governments that repeatedly deny access to justice for victims, fostering practices of impunity and corruption.
- We ratify our decision and vocation to continue promoting life, ushering the efforts and struggles of communities affected by mining and other extractive projects that seriously affect the life and future of Mother Earth and all the beings she supports. We invite other organizations and social movements to join forces in these struggles in favor of the communities, their territories, cultures and spiritualities.
- We call on the hierarchies and other heads of our churches to assume a greater commitment to those who suffer the consequences of this economic model of unbridled production, voracious consumerism and unlimited predation of nature. The guidelines of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* and the CELAM Pastoral Letter on Integral Ecology should serve to promote a new type of church, a new type of society, a new economy and a new form of relationship with the whole of Creation.
- To the communities and peoples that resist the attacks of extractivism, exposing their own lives, we thank them for their example, courage and prophetism. Their struggles and actions demand and show the world that another economy and other relationships are necessary, possible and urgent. We want to learn from them, walk with them, be evangelized by their actions and proposals, and build together alternatives that guarantee the harmonious *Buen Vivir* on our land.
- We require our states to take greater responsibility in administering the Common Good, a frontal fight against corruption, and the implementation and strict control of norms and laws that guarantee individual and community human rights; the rights of nature and the fundamental right of the peoples to decide their own development; effective processes of consultation that are free, prior, informed and in good faith; as well as the respect of the decisions of the peoples that emerged from these processes.
- We also call on the business world to eliminate its practices of criminal, irresponsible and predatory exploitation of lives, territories and cultures that are leading us to turn our Common Home into an "immense pile of filth", as Pope Francis indicates.
- The time has come for each person to assume the responsibility of building other production models that guarantee the lives of future generations and respect mother earth, to promote a basic and responsible consumption and to lay a stake in new ways of understanding integral development.

Finally, we indicate that, during this meeting we have had in mind at the center of our concerns the brothers of the countries that are suffering from various types of violence and attacks on their democratic and human rights, as in Nicaragua, Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, Honduras, El Salvador, etc. We demand the cessation of all types of violence, persecution and assassinations and the urgent implementation of mechanisms that guarantee processes of resolution of conflicts in a non-violent manner, framed in justice, respect for life and the fundamental rights of peoples.

**Participating and organizing entities of the Meeting
Brasilia, D.F. August 10, 2018.**