

Advocacy Factsheet: Extractivism in Latin America

Recommendations for Members of the European Parliament - September 2019



“We, the indigenous people of Guaviare (Colombia), are part of nature because we are water, air, earth and life of the environment created by God. Therefore, we ask that the mistreatment and extermination of ‘Mother Earth’ cease. The earth has blood and is bleeding, the multinationals have cut the veins of our ‘Mother Earth’. We want our indigenous cry to be heard by the whole world.”

—[Instrumentum Laboris](#), 17

WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

Many Latin American communities are heavily affected by the activities of extractive industries companies who exploit oil, gas, gold, silver, iron, copper, tin, amongst others, as well as by other large-scale development projects, such as agribusiness, highways, hydroelectric, wind power, etc. Worryingly, the situation in the region has deteriorated in recent years, as extractive activities are substantially increasing and are expected to grow even more in the coming years. This increase in extractives activities, mostly by transnational corporations, generates irreversible impacts on the livelihoods, ecosystems and human rights of local communities. Some of these companies have European owners, shareholders and clients.

Most Latin American governments have been supporting the practices of the extractive corporations through legal changes, such as reduction of taxes and lowering of ecological safeguards, as well as by putting the police and army at their service. Recently appointed presidents (Brazil, Colombia) are adopting policies in favour of the extractivism model. High levels of corruption involving government officials are also a big driver of the extractivist model. Moreover, those who defend their rights and territory are criminalised and murdered.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ACT?

- Every country in Latin America is affected by the negative impacts of extractive activities. Indigenous peoples, urban and rural mestizo, and Afro descendent communities have been the most affected in terms of human rights violations, while frequently they are unaware about their rights.
- More than half of the 2018 murders of land and environmental activists took place in Latin America, which has consistently ranked as the worst-affected region in the world ([Global Witness 2018 report](#)).
- Latin America is one of the most important regions in the world in terms of biodiversity and ecosystems, while the extraction of natural resources is an important driver of biodiversity loss ([OECD Latin America Economic Outlook 2019](#)).
- Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clauses in trade and investment agreements allow extractive businesses to sue governments in private courts when upholding public health and environmental laws. Central America and South America are the most sued regions in the world ([Mining Watch, Institute for Policy Studies and CIEL 2019 report](#)).

INSPIRING CASE FROM OUR PERUVIAN MEMBER ORGANISATION

The Aymara in the region of Puno have seen the water of the Condoraque River contaminated by a tungsten mine. The indigenous people were not consulted before the mining operations began their activities in the Seventies. A mining company later began operations in the area on the condition that it repair the environmental damage caused by the first mine company, but it didn't do so and entered into conflict with the indigenous community. The association Human Rights and Environment (DHUMA) facilitated training sessions for informing the community about their rights, as well as the strengthening of their capacities for undertaking nonviolent action to claim their rights. It has been working together with the community in monitoring the water and on a legal defence case in court. It resulted in the mining company entering into dialogue with the community and the launch of a restoration plan. The remediation is still under implementation and its full compliance is now under surveillance by the Aymara community and DHUMA.



AS A MEP YOU CAN SUPPORT LATIN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES!

As a Member of the European Parliament you can play a decisive role in supporting Latin American communities affected by extractive industries:

- Ask the European Commission and the EU External Action Service to pronounce themselves publicly about the threats and killings of Latin American land and environmental defenders and discuss such cases in the European Parliament.
- Push extractive companies to adhere to human rights through EU legislation and the creation of an EU grievance mechanism through which indigenous and local communities can lodge complaints regarding violations of their rights resulting from EU-based business activities, in line with last year's [EP report 2017/2206\(INI\)](#).
- Urge Latin American governments to comply with the sustainable development chapters of EU trade agreements and ILO Convention 169 on indigenous peoples, while discussing their compliance with civil society.
- Call for a resolution, further building on [previous ones](#), for the EU to participate in a constructive way in the negotiations for a UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights. Alongside this, call for the EU to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) through the [long-awaited EU action plan](#).



[Pax Christi International](#) is a Catholic peace movement with 120 member organisations worldwide promoting peace, respect for human rights, justice and reconciliation. Through our Latin American project, Pax Christi International has been witnessing growing human rights violations by extractives companies in Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, Chile and Paraguay. Through capacity-building and advocacy work we support our members and partners who are accompanying indigenous and local communities in their nonviolence resistance activities.