ENGLISH SUMMARY OF
A PAX CHRISTI INTERNATIONAL
PUBLICATION

ENTRE EL COVID-19
Y LAS POLÍTICAS
EXTRACTIVISTAS:
Impactos, retos y alternativas
para las comunidades que
resisten en América Latina
y el Caribe

PAX CHRISTI
INTERNATIONAL
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**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 extractive companies in Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, Chile, El Salvador 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.
Between Covid-19 and Extractivist Policies: Impacts, Challenges, and Alternatives to resisting communities in Latin America and the Caribbean

Extractivist processes in Latin America and the Caribbean are the continuity of a process of dispossession to which the region has been subjected from the 15th century to the present. The former colonies were plundered in the search for minerals and raw materials and transformed into nations equally plundered by multinational corporations for the same purpose. This continuity has shaped a deeply unequal international scenario. The countries of the “Global South” have assumed the very serious environmental, social, and economic costs of an unequal and unbalanced system that—after the unfulfilled promise of “development”—has left water pollution, diseases in communities, destruction of fields, and violence against populations that resist looting.

Through the project Latin America, between Violence and Hope, Pax Christi International has accompanied communities and organisations resisting extractivist practices in seven countries (Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Paraguay, Chile and El Salvador). The project aims to:

a) strengthen the capacity of communities for the nonviolent transformation of conflicts caused by extractivism;

b) design and implement local, national, and global advocacy plans; and

c) strengthen networking in the region in order to act in a coordinated, informed, and supportive way to defend the territories, communities, and the land itself.
Extractivism in the region

The region is an expression of the highly unequal global economic model. The so-called “countries of the North” (the great centres of world economic development such as the United States, China, United Kingdom, Canada, among others), hand in hand with transnational corporations, perpetuate a historic international division of labour. The region exports raw materials, bearing the social, environmental, political and cultural costs of these practices, while products made with those same raw materials are later exported back to the region with a higher added value. As Pope Francis points out: “Inequality affects not only individuals, but entire countries, and forces us to think about an ethic of international relations. Because there is a real ecological debt, particularly between the North and the South, related to trade imbalances with ecological consequences, as well as the disproportionate use of natural resources historically carried out by some countries. Exports of some raw materials to satisfy markets in the industrialised North have caused local damage, such as mercury contamination in gold mining or sulphur dioxide in copper mining. Especially, we must calculate the use of the environmental space of the entire planet to deposit gaseous residues that have been accumulating for two centuries and have generated a situation that now affects all the countries of the world.”

The imposition of the extractivist model has brought with it the promise of generating wealth for exporting nations, their insertion into the world order, and the ability to generate mass employment. This promise, however, has never fully materialised. On the contrary, it shows a series of negative effects for communities and territories. Some of the most recurrent are:

- Expansion of agricultural frontiers with great environmental damage and the destruction of vital biodiversity areas
- Damage of water sources
- Recurrent health problems for communities, such as respiratory conditions, skin cancer, among others
- Limited job opportunities, usually targeting men as precarious and temporary labour
- Destruction of ancestral economies
- Changes in the social and cultural dynamics of the places where these projects are carried out
- Militarisation of territories and criminalisation of communities resisting extractive projects

The increasing pressure on the territories and the life in general of peasant, Indigenous, and Afro descendant populations and peoples has triggered social rejection and the emergence of conflicts between communities, companies, and states. As of June 2020, the Latin American mining conflict observatory (OCMAL) records 277 socio-environmental conflicts associated with mining in the region, of which five are transnational. Communities are displaying an increasingly organised resistance to the implementation of these projects in their territories, an action that according to the same observatory has led to 234 cases of criminalisation of protest. This has also awakened the inte-
rest of multiple organisations to transform these conflicts and generate alternatives in the territories.

The world has come to a halt . . .

In this context of looting and resistance, the year 2020 erupts and with it the Covid-19 global health pandemic. The whole world has stopped, our ways of relating have been reconfigured, and quarantines and measures of social distancing have been decreed. Above all, the shortcomings of the neoliberal economic model have been exposed as never before. The model is traditionally anchored in extractive processes that creates a world without consideration of the lives of the vast majority. Limited access to health services, the interruption of educational systems, the fragility of online education in contexts of exclusion are some of the hallmarks of this system. It also ensures the economic precariousness of those who obtain their resources day by day and who with the pandemic measures cannot access the minimum resources for their subsistence. This all leads to the possible advent of a food crisis and the certainty of living in a world configured to support a tiny minority that enjoys rights to which the majority has no access.

Impact of Covid-19 on the Latin American and Caribbean Communities

The pandemic and the measures adopted for its control have affected with greater severity certain populations that see their multiple vulnerabilities exposed:

- The historically abused and unprotected Indigenous populations, who resist the dispossession and contamination of their territories, today face an irrational extermination. The extractive activities in their territories did not stop and the infection increases without control;
- Children and adolescents in the region have their studies interrupted while food shortages, labour exploitation, and suffering from violence increases;
- Women for whom quarantine has meant an excessive increase in workloads, caregiving functions and alarming increase in rates of family violence;
- Homeless migrants, for whom “stay at home” is not an option, exposed to the virus and xenophobic intolerance, which is also a pandemic;
- And rural populations, who are more vulnerable day by day, sharpening the gap between the urban and rural world.

The pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of the healthcare system throughout the region, which had pre-existing conditions unfavourable for communities and favourable for the spread of the virus. This includes, precarious healthcare systems that are suddenly faced with a high demand for intensive care units, use of mechanical respirators, and specialised medical personnel.
The lack of access to basic services is a flagrant violation of human rights and a situation within which multiple communities find themselves in Latin America and the Caribbean. Combating the spread of the disease becomes impossible if communities lack something as basic as access to water to ensure hand-washing habits.

Extractive companies have not stopped their activities during the pandemic and continue to affect populations and the environment. The so-called “economic reactivations” decreed by the region’s governments have allowed companies to compel their workers to make sworn statements releasing them (the companies) of responsibilities regarding the workers’ health risks of contagion.

Hope and resistance persist in the face of the extractivist agenda

The project Latin America, between violence and hope has just completed the first year (July 2019 to June 2020) of its third stage. Partner organisations in the Pax Christi International network participating in the project and the communities supported by these partners raise their voices to denounce the practices that continuously affect their rights. At the same time, the communities continue strengthening their resistance and resilience to propose alternatives to the global crisis. These include considering changes in lifestyle in the region and worldwide, and building a sustainable future based on environmental justice, food sovereignty, eco-spirituality, nonviolence, and political lobbying.

Despite all these changes, risks and violations exposed by the planetary crisis we live, there is also place for hope. The crisis is also an opportunity to rethink the current model of exclusion and discrimination and, in fact, there are multiple voices in the world proposing it. Pax Christi International, as a global Catholic movement, wanted to record these voices in this document.

Pope Francis in his letter to community movements invites us to consider an integral developmental model focusing on people, their diversity and access to the three Ts (in Spanish, tierra, techo, and trabajo, meaning land, roof and work). Social movements worldwide advocate for the universal basic income as a strategic measure to fight structural inequality. Communities resisting extractivism have also reshaped their actions: teleconferences, using social networks, community radio, and the possibility to connect and amplify messages virtually are important tools more than ever before. Rural communities displaced to big cities have implemented “community kitchens” as a way to resist and act in solidarity. This booklet is in itself a tool adapted to this new reality to share a message of
strength, resistance, and needed transformation in everyone’s lives and the earth itself.

**Advocacy in the Region**

Civil organisations and networks, as well as resisting communities, have analysed the impact of extractivist policies and practices during Covid-19, and raised their voices denouncing and demanding public policies, including:

• The Covid-19 pandemic has made evident the crisis of the neoliberal model based on extractivism, meaning an economic model in which very few accumulate wealth, while provoking an environmental unbalance and an irresponsible exploitation of nature

• There is a systematic lack of public legislation protecting the environment in Latin America and the Caribbean

• Transnational corporations have weakened states, making the latter serve the former’s interests, what is known as “corporative capture”

• There is a nonstop criminalization, persecution, and murder of communities and leaders resisting extractivism and the protecting rivers, mountains, and territories

• A worrying and growing tendency to privatise water sources by multinational corporations, building of dams, and mining practices

In regard to these realities and concerns, it is crucial that, during the Covid-19 emergency:

• Attention to the most vulnerable populations is prioritised before powerful economic and political interests, as corruption in most countries is widely spread. This demands the implementation of economic support

• Measures to such populations, adopting a differentiated approach regarding ethnic background, age, and cultural needs, focusing on gender, respecting rural and Indigenous communities’ rights

• Governments respect the right to self-determination of the communities and their right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent, as stated in the ILO Agreement 169, challenged during these emergency times by the confined communities’ lack of access to technologies

• Legislation is passed in each country to protect the water sources from mining

• States create and monitor regulatory frameworks to manage non-renewable natural resources, adapting their productive capabilities to sustainable development models that are built collectively with the communities

• The UN principles regarding companies and human rights apply, favouring the communities, not the market economy

• OAS member states respect the ICHR recommendations regarding the protection of human rights activists, especially in the context of the pandemic conditions

• Governments do not grant privileges or exceptions to companies that ought to follow biosecurity protocols required worldwide

• Extractivist companies’ activities are duly carried out, respecting local communities’ rights to health services, proper working conditions, social participation, and so on

• New permits to extractive projects or widening of existing ones are suspended, as long as conditions for local communities to participate in the consultations are missing
It is necessary to accompany the thousands of people who face extractivism in the region. Their struggle is not an exclusive struggle, it is the struggle for the present and future of humanity.

The communities in resistance need to amplify their voice, recognise in many other allies the real possibility to build a tangible alternative, to make a visible and build a real development that is grounded in, at least, five elements:

- environmental justice against historical social debt with our rivers, mountains, and communities;
- food sovereignty, as the right of peoples;
- universal basic income, as an alternative that should not hide the underlying structural problem but as a possibility for people to have their minimum needs satisfied;
- solidarity and eco-spirituality as processes of human awareness;
- the transformation through advocacy with a focus on a theory of change towards shared decision-making scenarios.

So we can build a true alternative future for humanity and the planet.
While extractivism continues, so will the people’s resistance!

Environmental Justice

Environmental justice is part of the overall social justice that oppressed peoples have demanded through different ways of exercising rights. This includes land to cultivate, tools that mobilise people and communities that, in addition to raising awareness about care for life, water and territory, organise themselves and find creative ways to design and propose an agenda for the enforcement of rights. These are rights which have been systematically violated by transnational and multinational companies of public and private (mixed) capital and state policies, finding, in most cases, total silence, oblivion and impunity.

If the Covid-19 pandemic has its origin in the ecological imbalance caused by a voracious relationship with the planet and whose costs are counted in thousands of human lives, the answer cannot be different from recovering such balance. This answer is rooted in the fundamental understanding that excessive anthropocentrism and the figure of a dominating human being in nature has caused a great deal of damage.

The transformation of our own relationship with the Common “Shared House” is necessary, putting a halt to excessive consumption habits, and eradicating the prevailing selfishness from which this system of violence, dispossession and inequalities is nourished. It is necessary to understand ourselves as part of a whole and as the Pope Francis would say, “betting on a new lifestyle.”
Food Sovereignty

Weaknesses in supply and poor capacity to acquire food can quickly become a very big problem in the region. The economic crises that countries are facing, the fall in the prices of primary goods at the international level, and the impact on the entire food system chain can transform the Covid-19 pandemic into a food crisis. In this regard, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) have published the report: How to prevent the COVID-19 crisis from turning into a food crisis - Urgent actions against hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Some of the main ideas of the report include alternatives that communities have proposed for many years in response to neoliberal extractivist policies: agriculture as an essential activity; the need for alternative public policies in agriculture, food and rural issues towards an integral ecology; integration between agriculture and biodiversity; the need of renewal towards a true food sovereignty, as the basis to guarantee a possible future for the communities of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Universal Basic Income

The so-called Universal Basic Income is "a monetary allocation, paid by the public statements, according to three principles: universality, that is, that it is received by all citizens of a territory; unconditionality, meaning that you receive it in any circumstance that accompanies your life regardless of, for example, income levels or number of people you live with, and, thirdly, individuality, individuals receive it, not homes."

Universal Basic Income is an alternative that should not hide the underlying structural problem and is the large number of people that do not have their minimum needs satisfied. For example, there are significant groups of people who are informally employed as well as an enormous deficit in rights that we observe in the region. Although it is a measure that must be promoted in the midst of the crisis, it is not a substitute for the guarantee of rights and the need for much deeper changes than simply turning resources or delivering markets to populations.
“I know that you have been excluded from the benefits of globalisation. You do not enjoy those superficial pleasures that anesthetise so many consciences. Despite this, you always have to suffer their damages. The damages that afflict you all, strike you doubly. Many of you live day to day without any legal guarantees to protect you. The street vendors, the recyclers, the tradesmen, the small farmers, the builders, the seamstresses, those who carry out different care tasks. You, informal workers, freelancers or working informally, do not have a stable salary to resist this moment ... and the quarantines are unbearable for you. Perhaps it is time to think about a universal salary that recognises and dignifies the noble and irreplaceable tasks that you perform; capable of guaranteeing and realising that so human and so Christian slogan: no worker without rights.”

Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Popular Movements, April 2020
Solidarity and Eco-Spirituality

It will not be possible to rebuild the world and see an alternative for the future if we do not propose a change that arises from the depths of our hearts, from a dimension that transcends the material and that allows us to meet each other, to experience unity and harmony.

We are one with nature, the planet earth is the "Shared House", and its wealth cannot and should not be considered instrumentally as goods capable of being exploited indiscriminately. Eco-spirituality as an experience and as a human exercise, plural and diverse, calls on all of us to transform ourselves into defenders of land, water, the environment and life, so that we find paths of union and transcendence to think about what we have received and what we want to deliver to future generations.

The encyclical Laudato Si' is a call from Catholicism for a new dialogue about the future beyond religious institutions. It is situated in the spiritual sphere and connects us as brothers and sisters in different faiths. It bonds us as a humanity that shares the consciousness of understanding itself as part of the planet and of feeling interdependent with it and with others. This is a humanity that understands that its care is care of the present and the future. This is the duty of every man and woman who wants to transform injustices and correct the imbalance that we have today in Mother Earth.

It is essential to rediscover balance, decrease the unbridled consumption, see the death of policies that turn off the life of the rivers, the forests, and with them our own life. We must pave the way for dialogue and deep action and converge with the defenders of the life in sense of solidarity and fellowship. We must come to understand our place in the world not as the great owners but as part of a complex system that hurts us by being wounded, that heals us by being healed, that cares for us by being cared for.
The role of advocacy in social reconstruction after Covid-19

Advocacy is a form of citizen participation that seeks to mobilise communities to influence those who make the decisions that affect them at the local, regional, national and even international level. Advocacy seeks to transform public policies and state programs towards the Common Good. It also seeks to monitor Extractive Corporations programs to accomplish with national and international norms, respecting Communities' rights and avoiding environmental damages. Advocacy then refers to organised efforts of communities against those who hold power. In this way, communities make their power felt, systematically influencing, and planning it.

From Pax Christi International and within the framework of the project Latin America, between Violence and Hope, the importance of this form of collective participation has been stressed with the communities and organisations that resist extractivism in Latin America and the Caribbean. Advocacy is essential to transform public policies that affect the life and day-to-day life of communities, but also to position concrete alternative ideas that emerge from the territories. Social reconstruction in a post-Covid-19 era will open new windows of opportunity to influence local, regional and national governments and, in this sense, it is key that organised communities continue and deepen the consolidated strategies in their action and advocacy plans. We must continually evaluate the new scenarios that will be presented in the territories. We must also articulate with the increasingly powerful voices that the world will demand with greater force a change in the ways of relating to the planet. In this sense, the network efforts that are already important will be of even greater importance to enable the necessary transformations in the territories.