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## For a Samaritan Church that Listens to the Cries of the Poor and of the Earth

On January 25 of this year, the community and the Church of Brumadinho, in Brazil, commemorated the 7th anniversary of the socio-environmental crime caused by the mining company Vale in the state of Minas Gerais, which resulted in the violent deaths of 272 people. This crime—one of the most serious among many others that have occurred—once again showed the consequences of predatory extractivist mining, which devastates communities and territories with the sole aim of turning common goods into money.

With great pain and concern, we have learned, via *Vatican News*, that on the eve of this painful commemoration, Pope Leo XIV met with a group of business leaders from the energy and critical minerals sector operating in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to the Vatican's news outlet, the meeting—organized by the Pontifical Commission for Latin America “focused on identifying threats and opportunities for the sector in the region and jointly discerning future actions, in the hope of promoting a dignified and abundant life for all, in line with the message of the Church.”

Mining business leaders did not miss the opportunity to present themselves as collaborators of dioceses and parishes and to request that the Church act as a “critical observer and mediator” in conflict zones. It pains and concerns us that business leaders—perpetrators of crimes against humanity and against nature on our continent—are considered to be part of the Samaritan mission entrusted to us as a Church.

As pastoral agents who walk alongside communities threatened and affected by the impacts of mining in Latin American countries, we know that companies seek to co-opt and use religious leaders to launder their image and gain social approval, in contexts where they face growing disapproval and resistance from the communities in whose territories they operate. The corporate strategy is to make churches their allies in order to legitimize the impacts of their operations and to use them as mediators in any conflict.

As people and institutions of faith, we believe that dialogue is a very valuable instrument for uniting wills and building bridges. However, it requires certain minimum conditions to fulfill that role. One of those conditions is precisely that all involved actors must always be listened to. And in the case of the Church, this must always be done from the preferential option for victims and the poor, as Jesus of Nazareth taught us and as Pope Leo XIV recently reminded us in *Dilexi Te*.

There are many pastoral agents who have been murdered, persecuted, and criminalized for defending their communities and territories in fidelity to their faith and Christian commitment, and who are part of this living Church.



One of them is the martyr Juan López, minister of the Word of the Diocese of Trujillo, in Honduras, who days before being murdered for opposing mining in his community, reminded us:

“In Honduras we are slowly awakening to the need to recover and care for the land, water, forests, the environment, and territories in general. We have undertaken struggles throughout the country, and tensions flare up among neighbors. Companies co-opt leaders who, for less than thirty pieces of silver, put their lives at the service of major corporate interests; together with the companies they activate the entire media arsenal and condemn communities that resist giving in, under the discourse of ‘opposing development.’”

We reiterate the position of so many pastoral networks and faith communities that, from their presence in the territory, express their concern over the escalation of violence brought by extractivism—such as the stance expressed by REMAM in rejecting mining as a response to the cries of the territories it accompanies. Likewise, the position expressed by the Churches and Mining Network in the “Open Letter to the Bishops and Pastors of Latin America,” published in January 2016, which expressed concern about the increase in “violence and the criminalization of individuals and entire communities that take a critical stance toward mining in Latin America.” That same letter firmly criticizes the strategy of mining companies which, unable to demonstrate that their activities are sustainable, seek the support of entities that enjoy credibility among the people. “Communities expect the Church not to maintain ‘neutral’ positions in the face of conflicts generated by mining. Recognizing ‘the immense dignity of the poor’ (LS 158), the Church must continue to take up their cry and position itself at their side and at the side of Creation.”

In 2024, about, twenty bishops from Latin America and the Caribbean who live in regions threatened or in conflict due to mining met in Panama to discern pastoral paths together with their people. They then published, together with CELAM, “Pastoral Guidelines of the Catholic Churches on Mining,” inviting pastors and religious leaders to listen to the cries of Mother Earth and the martyrs of communities affected by extractivism. Our ancestral, indigenous, Afro-descendant, peasant, and urban communities have an infinite number of alternatives for living that take into account a harmonious relationship with the environment, with rivers, forests, and all of Creation. Let us dialogue and seek solutions that guarantee the life of human and non-human beings, who are all creatures of God.

In this regard, we insist on the importance of Pope Leo XIV meeting with the victims of mining and devoting real and meaningful time to listening to their dreams, visions, and projects, as well as to the religious leaders who for years have walked alongside these communities, sharing their pain, nonviolent resistance, and hopes from their eco-spirituality.

Let us put into practice the call of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* to protect and care for our Common Home. Let us also take into account the document of the Churches of the Global South ahead of COP



30, which encourages us not to accept “false solutions” to today’s energy challenges and calls us to guarantee a healthy future for coming generations.

**Lord, take us with your power and your light,  
to protect all life,  
to prepare a better future,  
so that your Kingdom may come  
of justice, of peace, of love, and of beauty.**

**SIGNED BY:**

- Churches and Mining Network – RIM
- Brazilian Commission for Justice and Peace
- Mesoamerican Ecclesial Network – REMAM
- Ecclesial Network of the Gran Chaco and Guaraní Aquifer – REGCHAG
- Pan Amazonian Ecclesial Network – REPAM
- Pax Christi International
- JPIC Commission Union of Superiors General (USG) and the International Union of Superiors General (UISG)