

EXTRACTIVES AND CATHOLIC PEACEBUILDING – INTEREST GROUP

Topic: Church Action on Mining in the Matrix of Peace in Colombia  
Convener: Caesar A. Montevocchio, University of Notre Dame  
Moderator: Laurie Johnston, Emmanuel College  
Presenter: Msgr. Hector Fabio Henao, Episcopal Conference of Colombia/Cáritas  
Colombiana  
Respondents: Vincent Miller, University of Dayton  
Tobias Winright, St. Louis University

Hector Fabio Henao began with a story about Bojayá, a town in northwestern Colombia, where over 100 civilians were killed during a confrontation between rebel and paramilitary groups in 2002. Afterward, 5,000 people in the region around the town were displaced from their lands. The Episcopal Conference of Colombia worked closely with the people to establish land titles for their return, but the government gave concessions to a multinational mining company to develop mines in the area. However, a court decision recognized the land titles and prevented the mining development. The story illustrated how peace and mining interrelate in Colombia. Henao noted that the country's conflicts have shifted toward being about control of natural resources, especially with illegal armed actors turning increasingly to illegal mining instead of drug trafficking.

Another problem is the opening of rainforest lands previously held by rebel groups to mining development after the 2016 Peace Agreement. The agenda of the church to address this has focused on the dual importance of the dignity of the person and the dignity of creation. According to Henao, the church needs a stronger theology of creation to help people understand relationships with the land and the need for ecological protection. Henao referred specifically to an “ecology of the poor.” The ecology of the poor is intended to help renew that protection, rallying greater awareness and action for resisting destructive and irresponsible development and protecting the forest and the indigenous peoples who live there.

Vincent Miller provided the first response to Henao's presentation. Miller began with the question of how people in the global north can live in solidarity with situations like those in Colombia. He noted that the frequent opaqueness of global supply chains makes it very challenging. He then observed a crucial contrast: the systems that preserve the status quo of the global supply chain are far more robust and resilient than the fragile systems that attempt to accompany impacted communities, support policy changes, or exercise monitoring or oversight. Miller argued that the global market should be understood as an architecture of indifference, that is, a system that constructs ignorance about supply chains and resources and the way they often include violence, exploitation, and ecological damage. And in Miller's view, the Catholic Church is capable of doing more to resist this architecture. He offered three ways in which the church, being present at all points and levels of the global supply chain, can strengthen solidarity between those in the global north and those in the global south directly impacted by mining: provide formation to overcome the lack of connection consumers have with the people at the origins of supply chains; better develop the concept of integral ecology, including a relational understanding of the world that makes solidarity

*Interest Group: Extractives and Catholic Peacebuilding*

more necessary; and form ecclesial communication networks to provide dialogue and story-sharing between communities in the global north and communities in the global south.

The second response was given by Tobias Winright. Winright highlighted the challenge of those unwilling to engage with the church's efforts for accompaniment and dialogue. Specifically, those in the mining industry unwilling to recognize the church's way of seeing the situation. He asked how the church can find channels to have meaningful discussions with such companies. Winright also focused on the way mining must be considered under the rubric of integral peacebuilding. He commented that the way conflict destroys the environment, and the way that environmental destruction, like that from mining, leads to conflict mean that mining and conflict must be treated as truly interwoven issues, not ones that are simply adjacent to one another. Peacebuilding addresses conflict at all stages as well as the factors that fuel conflict. An integral peacebuilding approach, grown from an understanding of integral ecology, will address the inhumane treatment of the environment as well as peoples. Winright closed with a call for the church to expand its creativity at all levels of mining issues and to work to expand its partnerships as much as possible.

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