

The Catholic Social Tradition and Mining:

An Annotated Bibliography¹

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Summary

*In the 1970s-1980s, documents of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) were marked by a growing concern for the environmental consequences of the global economic order. From the 1990s onwards, references to mining and extractive industries increased. Local bishops' conferences, particularly in resource-rich countries and areas of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, began issuing more frequent statements on mining. From 2000 onwards, the ecological and social dimensions of mining have been an explicit concern in CST documents. References to mining increased, and became more action-oriented, bolder, and more urgent in tone over time. This Annotated Bibliography includes documents issued by the Magisterium that offer an analysis of global realities and local communities' experiences as well as academic literature on the topic. We have not included parish-level statements or short content like press statements in order to limit the length. The bibliography is divided into six parts: 1) Encyclical and Apostolic Exhortations from Pope Leo XIII to Benedict XVI; 2) Encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations under Pope Francis; 3) Other Papal Statements; 4) Regional and National Episcopal Documents; 5) Academic Literature. This Annotated Bibliography is not exhaustive and is a work in progress. With more than 5,000 dioceses globally, the task of scanning local realities and Catholic Church involvement in mining issues is a collective project. **We invite readers to let us know of any relevant material that could be added to this bibliography.***

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Part 1: Encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations from Leo XIII to Benedict XVI

Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1891)

This first encyclical on capital and labor, in which Leo XIII distances himself from socialism as much as from capitalism, establishes the foundation for CST by focusing on the rights and duties of workers, property, and the role of the state in regulating economic activity. While not addressing the extractive industries directly, it lays the groundwork for future considerations of industrial activities, including mining.

Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931)

Celebrates the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, expands on its themes, and critiques economic systems that prioritize profit over human dignity, which is a recurrent plea in later teachings in relation to mining.

John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963)

Post-World War II, attention is turned anew to socio-economic development, with an international perspective. John XXIII lays out the obligation of rich countries to assist poor countries while respecting their cultures, and notes the threat of global economic imbalance to world peace. *Mater et Magistra* endorses the “see, judge, act” methodology of Catholic social action, which will become the bedrock of Catholic Church engagement in relation to mining and other social and ecological issues. Written during the Cold War, *Pacem in Terris* calls for nuclear disarmament and banning nuclear weapons. Though not mentioning the sourcing of the minerals for weapons, it lays the ground for later connection between conflict, arms trade, and mining, including uranium mining. It is also the first encyclical to be addressed to “all men of good will,” Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967)

Written shortly after the Second Vatican Council, which had opened the Church to the modern world and called her to scrutinize the “signs of times” and interpret them in the light of the Gospel (*Gaudium et Spes* §4), the encyclical analyzes the postcolonial world of the time. It states that free international trade alone is inadequate to correct disparities between the industrialized “West” and the “Third World” and critiques exploitative economic practices in developing nations, which often include mining activities. Reiterates that rich countries have moral obligations towards poor nations and emphasizes the Church’s role in addressing global poverty and inequality. Coins the definition of integral human development as “Development [which] cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man” (§14).

Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971)

This apostolic letter pays increased attention to environmental issues and the global economic order, acknowledging the impact of industrialization on environmental degradation, and stresses the need for responsible stewardship of natural resources. Also addresses the challenge of urbanization and urban poverty, stressing the personal responsibility of Christians to respond to injustice.

John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (1981)

Stresses the dignity of labor and the Church’s defense of labor rights, including decent wages, the right to dignified work, the right to belong to a union, and the right to work in safe and healthy conditions.

John Paul II, [*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*](#) (1987)

Emphasizes integral human development and critiques economic systems that prioritize profit over human dignity. First official endorsement of a “preferential option for the poor” in the exercise of Christian charity.

John Paul II, [*Centesimus Annus*](#) (1991)

Commemorates the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, reiterating the Church’s concern for workers’ rights and the ethical dimensions of economic practices. Critiques socialism and unfettered capitalism, talks of the problem of consumerism and its ecological consequences (§37), and touches on environmental concerns related to industrial development which has implications for mining activities.

John Paul II, [*Ecclesia in America*](#) (1999)

This apostolic exhortation following the 1997 Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops addresses the challenges and exploitation faced by the Americas, calling for ethical considerations in economic activities. It reiterates the centrality of human dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity as foundations of social justice (§55). Noteworthy is the language of the “destruction of nature” as a “social sin crying to heaven”, and a “sign of a deep crisis caused by the loss of a sense of God and [...] the absence of moral points of reference, [in which] an unbridled greed for wealth and power takes over” (§56).

The Synod of Bishops’ [*Preparatory Document*](#) for the 1997 Special Assembly for America noted that societies “show signs of a materialistic and consumer style of life” that “produces a great lack of satisfaction” so that “[t]oday, many people motivated simply by the desire for possessions and exploitation of material resources, experience an inner emptiness” (§17). The increasingly inequitable distribution of the world’s resources is listed as “a particular appeal for conversion in America” (§27) and the lack of solidarity when facing disparities in development and resource distribution as well as disrespect for “the rights of ethnic minorities (primarily those of Indigenous peoples and African-Americans)” are identified as “urgent social problems” faced by North, Central, and South America (§53).

John Paul II, [*Ecclesia in Oceania*](#) (2001)

This apostolic exhortation following the 1998 Special Assembly for Oceania of the Synod of Bishops emphasizes the protection of Oceania’s “natural beauty” as a responsibility of all. It explicitly mentions mining as a vector of “deforestation, despoliation of the land, [and] pollution of rivers,” while also emphasizing that it “can bring great benefits when undertaken with due respect for the rights and the culture of the local population and for the integrity of the environment” (§31).

The two preparatory documents for the Special Assembly for Oceania referred to mining briefly. The [*Preparatory Document*](#) highlights the ecological harms of industrialization, extractive activities, and large scale farming and how they can disrupt traditional economic activities and cultures and impact ozone depletion (§26). It also states that mining ventures in the past forced large amounts of migration, and that migration at the present time is continuing and expanding to include peoples from outside the region, calling for special pastoral attention (§13). The [*Instrumentum Laboris*](#) places these concerns into an international perspective, noting that “[a]t present, Oceania is attempting to find its own identity in relation to Europe, Asia and America. It wants an identity that will be respected and honored by the great economical, political and financial powers of the world” seeking “ways to achieve greater self-sufficiency” at a moment where “[i]ndustrial companies from inside and outside the region were further exploring the natural resources” (§1) and calling the Church to provide “input on moral standards comprising the codes of ethics for the industry” (§25).

Benedict XVI, [*Caritas in Veritate*](#) (2009)

Reiterates that desire for and striving towards the common good “is a requirement of justice and charity” (§5); emphasizes the need for integral human development, which needs to uphold the centrality of the human person (§47) but includes respecting the environment and ensuring that economic activities do not harm the common good. Does not mention mining but urges for greater regulation of non-renewable resources, “involving poor countries in the process, in order to plan together for the future” (§49) so that “the economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources are recognized with transparency and fully borne by those who incur them, not by other peoples or future generations” (§50).

Benedict XVI, [*Africae Munus*](#) (2011)

This apostolic exhortation following the 2009 Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops acknowledges Africa's abundant natural resources and expresses concern about their exploitation, calling “the plundering of the goods of the earth by a minority to the detriment of entire peoples [...] unacceptable” (§24). It emphasizes the need for fair distribution of wealth and resources, stresses the importance of caring for creation and using natural resources responsibly, and underscores the primacy of human dignity in all economic activities.

Whereas the papal exhortation lays out these general principles applicable to mining, the preparatory documents produced for the Synod warn, in the words of the [*Instrumentum Laboris*](#), that as industrialized nations seek “access to the greatest mining reserves of the world, the abundance of natural resources on the African continent continue[s] to pose a threat to peace, justice and reconciliation” (§72). The document calls mining one of the “critical places in the life of African society” driving conflict, human trafficking, prostitution, forced migration, and forced labor (§51), even of children (§97), and notes that the underlying extractivist mentality threatens to widely destroy family ties, social cohesion, and “the best of local African traditions” (§72). Cardinal Peter Turkson, in his function as then General Relator for this Special Assembly producing the [*Official Report of Discussions*](#), notes that “the Assembly criticized the incidence of corruption and bribery, and the negotiation of contracts with investors, particularly of extractive industries, which bring no profit to the people, but cause conflicts and environmental degradation.” He flags coltan and other mining activities by multinational corporations as a source and driver of conflict, adding that “the Synod Fathers ask that there be put in place an international judicial system which would aim at controlling the activities of multinational and transnational mining companies.”

Part 2: Encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations under Pope Francis

With Pope Francis, integral ecology was mainstreamed as a new paradigm for the Church's engagement with the world. His statements with regard to economic development, social injustice, and environmental degradation grew more nuanced, urgent, and action-oriented over time. All of them emphasize the interconnectedness between environmental, social, economic, and cultural factors and thereby allow for a concise critique of mining industries and their often harmful impacts.

Laudato Si (2015)

This encyclical, subtitled “On Care for Our Common Home,” constitutes the road map *par excellence* for Churches’ responses to mining with its paradigmatic shift to integral ecology. Without giving a comprehensive account, some major points relevant to mining are:

- *Integral ecology is a holistic approach*: the exploitation of natural resources, including mining, cannot be viewed in isolation from its impact on human communities and the planet (cf. “everything is related” in §23, 70, 92, 120, 137, 139, 142; hearing “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” together in §49, 117); nor can we ignore the relationship between mining, global inequality, and environmental degradation (cf. §48-52).
- *Preferential option for the poor and the vulnerable* (cf. §2, 10, 158, 162, 190): calls to realize the disproportionate effects of mining and environmental degradation on poor communities (cf. §20, 25, 49, 170); mining projects exhaust local communities’ livelihoods while also undoing their social structures, thereby degrading particularly vulnerable nature and culture alike (§145).
- *The ecological crisis is in its depth a spiritual crisis* (cf. §119 and chapter 3): education in ecology and ecological spirituality are needed to complete a change in lifestyles as much as systemic consumption and production patterns (cf. §5 and chapter 5), what John Paul II labeled an “ecological conversion” (cf. §216-221).
- *Water, biodiversity, and the climate are common goods* (§95): to destroy them is “a sin against ourselves and a sin against God” (§8), and among such sins are mining activities, “especially in countries lacking adequate regulation or controls” (§29).
- *Critique of consumerism*: consumerism, technocracy, and relativism result in “human trafficking, organized crime, [... and] commerce in blood diamonds” (§123); recycling and circular economies should replace the currently preponderant “culture of waste” (§16) so that we may transition from a “throwaway culture” (§20-22, 43) to a “culture of care” (§231), from a “culture of premature death” (§48) to a “culture of life” (§213); environmental impact assessments should help to transcend immediate economic interests (§183).
- *Call for dialogue and transparency in decision-making*: to remedy damages already done, “no form of wisdom can be left out” (§63); religious, scientific, and indigenous forms of knowledge need to cooperate for finding effective solutions to challenges raised by mining (cf. §14, 199-201), and the Church should create networks in which inhabitants, environmental movements, businesses, governors, media, and researchers can come together in honest and open debate (§188).
- *Solidarity with Indigenous peoples*: rather than being forced to leave, Indigenous communities should be considered “the principal dialogue partners [...] when large projects affecting their land are proposed,” because “[f]or them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space [...] they themselves care for it best” (§146).

- *Solidarity and integral development*: mining practices are singled out for particular criticism because “the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time [...] has caused harm locally” and worsened global inequality (§51); calls for effective regulation (§53).
- *Renewable energies*: the encyclical commends the shift from extracted fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, stating it is needed “progressively [...] and] without delay” (§165), which bears important consequences for mining globally.

Querida Amazonia (2020)

This apostolic exhortation following the 2019 Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazonian Region of the Synod of Bishops is to be read alongside the Synod’s [final document](#) (§3). Both documents address mining directly and emphatically denounce the destructive impacts on Indigenous communities and surrounding ecosystems. The exhortation denounces “colonizing interests” in the mining sector which “have expelled or marginalized the Indigenous peoples, the river people and those of African descent” (§9). Businesses “which harm the Amazon and fail to respect the right of the original peoples to the land and its boundaries, and to self-determination and prior consent, should be called for what they are: *injustice and crime*” (§14). Such businesses may privatize potable water, corrupt local authorities, raze forests and pollute the environment, altering economic relationships to become “an instrument of death.” In doing so, they “frequently resort to utterly unethical means such as penalizing protests and even taking the lives of Indigenous peoples who oppose projects, intentionally setting forest fires, and suborning politicians and the Indigenous peoples themselves,” gravely violating human rights and women in particular (§14). Instead, Francis calls to conceive of new development and sustainable economic models that benefit local communities and the Amazon’s rich biodiversity alike.

The final document names an extractivist development model, which “responds to the logic of greed, typical of the dominant technocratic paradigm (cf. *LS* 101)” (§67), as the culprit of social and ecological destruction. Both the exhortation and final document describe these at length (migration, human trafficking, water, land, air contamination, land dispossession, violence, violation of human rights, killing of environmental defenders, biodiversity loss, deforestation, soil erosion, and others). The final document particularly highlights the plight of women who are forcibly displaced, and their vulnerability to human trafficking (§12-13). The only way forward given “the pressing situation of the planet and the Amazon” is integral ecology, which “is not one path among many that the Church can choose for the future in this territory, it is the only possible path, because there is no other viable route for saving the region” (§67).

Fratelli Tutti (2020)

Despite not being directly focused on environmental issues, the encyclical is relevant for its call to universal brotherhood and social friendship which imply a prioritization of human dignity and the common good over individual profits and economic gains. It reinforces the critique of exploitative economic practices as perpetuated by the mining industry and calls for global solidarity and a “better kind of politics” (chapter 5) to address global challenges and systemic injustices between peoples. It uses the paradigmatic example of the Parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate universal bonds of solidarity and responsibility to help the wounded, which also includes political love by creating the conditions for solidarity (§112-117) and human rights (§186-192) to be realized. Francis urges to always think about the local and the universal together (§139-151), to redistribute international power justly (§170-175), and to care for “fruitfulness over results” (§192-197). All these come together in what Francis calls a “culture of encounter” that can bring peace without erasing wrongdoings (§215-221).

Practically, this new culture of encounter translates into bringing all stakeholders involved with mining operations - from business leaders to shareholders, governments to local authorities, workers and their families to local communities, civil society representatives to researchers - together in open and honest dialogue in seeking solutions to the challenges raised. We must acknowledge that not only different levels of governance and communities, but altogether different sectors, scientific disciplines, forms of knowledge, and belief systems each have their unique contribution to make.

Laudate Deum (2023)

Addressed to the participants of COP28 in Dubai, this apostolic exhortation seeks to sharpen our sense of urgency about the need to address the climate crisis. It does not mention directly the environmental impacts of mining, but its urgent call for policy change and international action to regulate industrial activities contributing to carbon emissions and global warming strengthens the Church's advocacy with regard to mining activities as well.

Part 3: Other Papal Statements

Popes have reinforced and elaborated on themes presented in encyclicals and exhortations with several statements on mining and extractive activities, often delivered in messages, speeches and homilies in particular situations and contexts. These tend to be more specific in scope and more direct and forceful in tone. These statements might also have a more immediate impact on public discourse by calling for dialogue between or concrete action by governments, corporations, and local communities.

Pope Paul VI, “[Speech to the FAO on the 25th anniversary of its institution](#)” (November 16, 1970) and “[Message to the Secretary-General of the UN Conference on the Environment](#)” (July 5, 1972)

Both emphasize the gravity of pending ecological decline, and link a healthy environment to the fullness aimed for in integral human development.

John Paul II, “[Message for the World Day of Peace: Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation](#)” (January 1, 1990)

First mention of “ecological conversion” and of the ecological crisis as a “moral problem” (II §6-7): “Today, the dramatic threat of ecological breakdown is teaching us the extent to which greed and selfishness - both individual and collective - are contrary to the order of creation, an order which is characterized by mutual interdependence” (§8). Identifies an “*urgent need for a new solidarity*” (IV §10-14), which includes the need for “education in ecological responsibility: responsibility for oneself, for others, and for the earth” (§13). Stresses that “concerted efforts” are needed to solve the ecological crisis within the international community and that every human person bears a “grave responsibility to preserve this [created] order for the well-being of future generations” (§15).

Benedict XVI, “[Letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople on the Occasion of the Seventh Symposium of the Religion, Science and the Environment Movement](#)” (September 1, 2007)

Calls for “a deepening global recognition of the vital relationship between the ecology of the human person and the ecology of nature”.

Benedict XVI, “[Message for the World Day of Peace: If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation](#)” (January 1, 2010)

Reinforces the arguments of John Paul II’s 1990 Word Day of Peace Message, and of *Caritas in Veritate* that “the book of nature is one and indivisible. It includes not only the environment but also individual, family, and social ethics: our duties towards the environment flow from our duties towards the person, considered both individually and in relation to others” (§12).

Benedict XVI, “[Address to Six New Ambassadors Accredited to the Holy See](#)” (July 9, 2011)

Talks of human ecology as “an imperative need”, and notes the necessity “to review our entire approach to nature. It is not a place solely for exploitation or for play. It is man’s native land, in a certain sense his ‘home’. This is fundamental for us. The shift of mentality in this domain, that is, the constraints it brings, allows us rapidly to become more proficient in the art of living together that respects the alliance between man and nature, without which the human family risks disappearing.”

Francis, “[Address on the occasion of the Day of Reflection on the Mining Industry](#)” (September 7, 2013)

Highlights the need for mining companies to operate with respect for human dignity and the environment and stresses the importance of ethical responsibility in business operations, especially in Africa and other developing regions. Francis invites “senior mining executives to make a serious examination of conscience” for the industry to contribute to integral human development.

Francis, “[Address to World Meeting of Popular Movements in Santa Cruz, Bolivia](#)” (July 9, 2015)

Condemns “industrial and agricultural methods which damage Mother Earth in the name of productivity,” and the economic system which “continues to deny many millions of our brothers and sisters their most elementary economic, social and cultural rights.” He exclaims “Let us say NO, then, to forms of colonialism old and new. Let us say YES to the encounter between peoples and cultures.” He urges social movements to take action and be artisans of their own destiny towards justice and defending Mother Earth.

Francis, “[Message on the occasion of the Meeting ‘A Day of Reflection – United to God, We Hear a Cry’](#)” (July 17, 2015)

Seeks to bring together with this meeting different mining-affected people to bring to the fore their many cries: “A cry for the lands lost; a cry for the extraction of riches from the soil which paradoxically has not produced wealth for the local populations, who remain poor; a cry of pain in reaction to violence, threats and corruption; a cry of indignation and for help for the violations of human rights, blatantly or discreetly trampled with regard to the health of populations, working conditions, and at times the slavery and human trafficking which feed the tragic phenomenon of prostitution; a cry of sadness and impotence for the pollution of the water, air and land; a cry of incomprehension for the lack of inclusive and supportive processes from civil, local and national authorities, which have the fundamental duty to promote the common good.” Francis makes clear that “the entire mining sector is undoubtedly called to carry out a radical paradigm change to improve the situation in many countries” and invites attendees to “interact constructively with all the other actors involved [...] in a sincere and respectful dialogue,” so “that the necessary culture is created to address the present crisis.” It is noteworthy that Francis also calls investors, supply chain providers, and their various intermediaries, as well as consumers, to “make their contribution.”

Francis, “[Holy Mass with Representatives of the Indigenous Communities of Chiapas](#)” (February 15, 2016)

Addresses the environmental and social challenges faced by Indigenous peoples, including those caused by mining activities “plundering her [sister earth] at will.” Expresses solidarity with Indigenous peoples, denouncing those who “intoxicated by power, money and market trends, have stolen your lands or contaminated them” and calls for the protection of their lands and cultures from exploitative practices.

Francis, “[Address to Meeting with Indigenous People of Amazonia, Coliseo Regional Madre de Dios \(Puerto Maldonado\)](#)” (January 19, 2018)

Meeting with around 4000 representatives of the various peoples of Amazonia whom Francis praises for their “option for the defense of life, the defense of the earth and the defense of cultures.” He sees them as “a living memory of the mission that God has entrusted to us all: the protection of our common home.” Francis denounces “neo-extractivism,” “new forms of colonialism,” “various forms of imperialism,” and “great business interests that want to lay

hands on the Amazon's petroleum, gas, wood, gold" creating an unprecedented threat especially to Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation who are the "most vulnerable of the vulnerable" in need of defense together with all others suffering oppression, "physical harm from pollution," and forced migration. Illegal mining according to Francis creates a particularly "devastating assault on life," which includes "human trafficking, slave labor and sexual abuse." He urges a "break with the historical paradigm that views Amazonia as an inexhaustible source of supplies for other countries without concern for its inhabitants" to instead praise God and defend life, earth, and cultures.

Francis, "[Incontro con la popolazione presso l' "Istituto Jorge Basadre" a Puerto Maldonado](#)" (January 19, 2018)

Reiterates the criticism of mining industries operating without any type of control, taking Indigenous peoples' sacred lands, and even murdering and persecuting those trying to resist. Warns that being "drawn by the promising allure of gold mining" many forget that "gold can turn into a false god which demands human sacrifices" and reminds that prayers are needed as much as collective organizing to chase idolatry and corruption.

Francis, "[Address to Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps in the Palacio de Gobierno in Lima](#)" (January 19, 2018)

Emphasizes the Amazon as the lung of the planet. Urges replacing outdated development models with integral ecology, and listening to local populations as valid dialogue partners who have a "direct link" with the land. States that the "degradation of the environment [...] cannot be separated from the moral degradation of our communities" as illustrated by the growth of corruption and illegal mining which subject "many [...] to human trafficking [...], irregular employment and crime, and other evils."

Francis, "[Message after the Angelus Prayer, Panama – 34th World Youth Day](#)" (January 27, 2019)

Expresses grief for the tragedy of Brumadinho two days after the dam disaster, showing solidarity with the victims [over the following months](#), sending the Secretary of the Dicastery for Integral Human Development to hear and support people on the ground and receiving a survivor at the Vatican.

Francis, "[Address to Participants at the Meeting Promoted by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on the Mining Industry](#)" (May 3, 2019)

The pope calls for "mutual dialogue in the spirit of honesty, courage and fraternity." He quotes from *Laudato Si'* and the 2018 CELAM Pastoral Letter *Missionary Disciples* (*cf. infra*) at length and again urges a "paradigm shift in all our economic activities, including mining" so that they can be at the service "of the entire human community" as well as "of the human person and not vice versa."

Francis, "[Address to the Meeting with Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps in the Garden of the "Palais de la Nation" in Kinshasa](#)" (January 31, 2023)

Laments the various forms of exploitation that Africa has endured in the past and present, and uses direct language to describe the current situation: "There is a slogan that emerges from the subconscious of many cultures and peoples: 'Africa must be exploited.' This is terrible! Political exploitation gave way to an "economic colonialism" that was equally enslaving. As a result, this country, massively plundered, has not benefited adequately from its immense resources [...] The poison of greed has *smeared its diamonds with blood*. This is a tragedy to which the economically more advanced world often closes its eyes, ears and

mouth. Yet this country and this continent deserve to be respected and listened to [...]! Hands off the Democratic Republic of the Congo! Hands off Africa! Stop choking Africa: it is not a mine to be stripped or a terrain to be plundered. May Africa be the protagonist of its own destiny!”

Francis, “[Address to Participants in the Indigenous Peoples Forum](#)” (February 2, 2023)
Demands transformation of “the historical relations marked by colonialism, exclusion and discrimination, giving rise to a renewed dialogue.” Criticizes ignoring communities in attempts to protect the earth, saying it is a “grave error - it is extractive functionalism - not to mention a great injustice.”

Francis, “[Message on the Occasion for the Conference Our Ocean held in Panama City](#)” (March 3, 2023)
Reiterates the call to rally administrations, the private sector, researchers, politicians, representatives of culture, religious and youth organizations, as well as international organizations to protect and restore marine, coastal, and fluvial ecosystems with efficient institutional coordination. Expresses concern about the worrying “development of the extractive industry on the seabed” together with “the harsh and sometimes illegal working conditions of seafarers, and geopolitical tensions in marine areas considered important.”

Francis, “[Address to participants in the Consultation “Care is work, work is care” of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development](#)” (May 8, 2024)
Recalls that work and care are linked in a rather unique way in the mining sector, and that interests between workers and the environment clash only where economic activity is not considered a part of the care for our common home, or eventual consequences of environmental degradation for the physical and mental health of workers are disregarded.

Francis, “[Address to Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Consecrated Persons, Seminarians and Catechists at the Cathedral of our Lady of the Assumption in Jakarta](#)” (September 4, 2024)
Calls to see Indonesia’s richness in raw materials as “a reminder of God, of his presence in the cosmos and in our lives,” a “sign of his gratuitous and everlasting love as Father” which prompts us “to cultivate feelings of gratitude and responsibility.”

Francis, “[Address to the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps at Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea](#)” (September 7, 2024)
Recalls that natural riches are “*destined by God for the entire community*,” while international companies must give due consideration to the needs of local peoples when distributing proceeds and employing workers. Argues that “everyone, civil authorities and all citizens,” is required to bear responsibility that resources be mined “in a sustainable and equitable manner.” Francis emphasizes that stable institutions are a prerequisite for such development, and that abundance in resources “without a broader spiritual outlook turns in on itself and leads to a dryness of heart,” blocking progress and life in society. Calls to “seek cooperation with public institutions and with all people of good will.”

In 2015, Pope Francis instituted 1st September as a **World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation**, followed by a Season of Creation which runs from 1st September to 4th October, the Feast of St Francis. Each year, a strong message of ecological protection is issued by the pontiff. Several make explicit reference to mining:

- 2022 [message](#): “In the name of God, I ask the great extractive industries – mining, oil, forestry, real estate, agribusiness – to stop destroying forests, wetlands, and mountains, to stop polluting rivers and seas, to stop poisoning food and people.”
- 2023 [message](#): “Let us heed our call to stand with the victims of environmental and climate injustice, and to put an end to the senseless war against creation”; “Consumerist greed, fuelled by selfish hearts, is disrupting the planet’s water cycle”; “Predatory industries are depleting and polluting our freshwater sources through extreme practices such as fracking for oil and gas extraction, unchecked mega-mining projects, and intensive animal farming”; we must resolve “to transform our *hearts*, our *lifestyles*, and the *public policies* ruling our societies” in synodal fashion, that is in communion with “countless local Churches, religious communities and associations” which each add their “unique and irreplaceable contribution.”

Part 4: Regional and National Episcopal Documents

Since the 1990s, national bishops' conferences and regional episcopal councils began issuing more frequent statements on mining. Several national bishops' conferences in resource-rich countries have made the rights of mining-affected communities one of their pastoral priorities – for example in Colombia, Ghana, the Philippines, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Intensity and focus of episcopal statements can vary over time depending on local circumstances and leadership. All address environmental concerns, but with varying emphases on specific issues (e.g., water pollution, deforestation, Indigenous peoples' rights) given their national context. All also inscribe their statements into broader themes from Catholic Social Teaching, again with different emphasis given national contexts (e.g. Colombia and DRC focusing more on the link between mining and conflict; the bishops of the Amazon basin calling for a new model of economic development, and those of the Congo basin calling for a more equitable distribution of resources; Ghana focusing on illegal small-scale mining; or the Philippines opposing open-pit mining).

REGIONAL GROUPS

Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Council (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano y Caribeño, CELAM), “[Concluding Document of the V General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate in Aparecida, Brazil](#)” (May 2007)

The so-called “Aparecida document” is the concluding document of a conference on how to announce the Gospel, describing Latin America and the Caribbean itself as a “mine for evangelisation” (§416). The conference was convened by Pope John Paul II and inaugurated by Pope Benedict XVI. Jorge Bergoglio, the future Pope Francis, was its lead writer. In a [2020 meeting with French environmentalists](#), Francis confessed that the conference was his moment of ecological conversion: “As they [the bishops] were working on the final text, the proposals on Amazonia arrived, and I said, ‘How these Brazilians insist on this Amazonia. What has Amazonia got to do with evangelization? I underwent a journey of conversion, of conversion of the ecological problem. Before that I didn’t understand anything.’” The Aparecida document notes that “the mission of evangelization cannot proceed separated from solidarity with the poor and their integral development” (§545), and that “If we try to close our eyes to these realities [of poverty and exclusion] we are not advocates of the life of the Kingdom and we place ourselves on the path of death” (§358).

Among the mining-related issues that the Aparecida document discusses are: human rights violations and the sacrificing of people and nature to economic interests (§66), water pollution (§473), climate injustices and Indigenous peoples' rights (§§84, 90), and the link between the greed and selfishness of a few and social and environmental degradation. With regard to the latter, the document prominently lays the ground for subsequent critique of conventional development models, directly linking this critique to mining. It states that economic groups dealing with natural resources can no longer “irrationally demolish sources of life” (§471), “leaving a trail of squandering, and even death” throughout the region, and “particularly [in] the habitat of peasants and Indigenous peoples, who are expelled to sloping lands and to the big cities, where they live crammed into suburbs of misery” (§473). It blames the current economic model’s “inordinate desire for wealth” (*ibid*) and appeals to develop “an alternative development model, one that is comprehensive and communal”, inclusive and sustainable, based on integral ecology and human solidarity, that goes “beyond the utilitarian and individualist logic [... and] does not submit ethical criteria to economic and technological powers” (§474c).

CELAM, “Concluding Document of the Lima International Conference on Extractive Industries” (July 2011)

Cogently presents the situation of extractives in Latin America, to advance detailed proposals and demands for improvement for each situation of concern flagged. The growing demand for minerals strains the respect for human and workers’ rights violations, water systems and biodiversity, while also increasing social conflict, corruption, the power of multinationals over and against national sovereignty, and even persecutions of defenders (§§3-21). The document calls for greater taxation and more equitable share of profits (§§ 11, 13), as well as national legal and political regulatory frameworks ensuring compliance with international standards and effective monitoring of signed contracts (§40) and prior consultations including impartial scientific impact assessments about whose outcomes the public ought to be informed before authorizing new projects (§41). Indigenous and mining-affected communities ought to be included throughout the process of project approval (§42). Besides granting the right to free, prior and informed consent (§§41-42), governments ought to check impartially, rigorously, and with transparency on companies throughout the lifespan of a project (§44). The Church is singled out for “support and involvement in the capacity- building, training and awareness of communities” and in “facilitating dialogue and avoiding violence, coordinating and unifying the work of civil society at an international scale, as well as forming alliances between unions, businesses, and other organizations with affected communities” (§22). The Church is reminded of its duty to promote social doctrine throughout the mining industry (§45), which the document summarises in §§23-29, and to disseminate information about extractive industries’ risks and benefits, in hope for more informed choices and alternative proposals from the public (§46). The Church is also called to redouble efforts to influence government policies “with pastoral creativity” (§47) so as to provoke a general “change in mentality and practice” (§48).

CELAM, “Missionary Disciples: Custodians of Our Common Home. Discernment in the Light of the Encyclical *Laudato Si*” (2018)

This pastoral letter, written in a collaboration with various Catholic organizations in Latin America such as Caritas agencies and the Conference of Religious, re-affirms the Aparecida and *Laudato Si* commitments to integral ecology, applying them directly to extractive activities which are called “the greatest challenge” currently posed to the continent (§10). The document seeks “to analyze, interpret and discern what are appropriate or inappropriate extractive activities in the territories; then, propose, plan, and act to transform our own way of life, to influence the mining and energy policies of states and governments” so as to achieve “the common good and a genuine human development that is integral and sustainable” (§12). Extractivism is defined - a definition taken up by Francis in official addresses - as “an unbridled tendency of the economic system to convert the goods of nature into capital [...] into products and services that others will market, society will consume and then nature itself will receive in the form of polluting waste,” thereby alighting a “consumerist loop that is being generated at ever greater speed and ever greater risk” (§11). The document lays out the specific vocation and mission of pastors with regard to combating extractivism (Chapter I), before taking stock of the Church’s past milestones (Chapter II) and drawing a detailed picture of the reality challenging us (Chapter III). It also devotes a whole chapter to CST and extractivism that surveys Scripture and explains core theological concepts and social principles (Chapter IV), and offers lines of action because “faith without works is dead” (Chapter V). The document highlights the following lines of action. First, it demands that “supranational normative bodies and authority” generate a consensus on the mining issue which “cannot be addressed in all its complexity and magnitude by private individuals, nor even by individual states” (§50), given that some “companies [...] carry out practices that are considered illegal in their countries of origin, yet [...] carry them out with impunity in Latin American countries” (§52). Second is the

warning against cooptation of the Church, or representation of “sectors of the Church [as] supporters of their megaprojects, in exchange for infrastructure, money, benefits, etc.” It invites to discern in each particular case how to respond to mining activities “without manipulating the principles of faith and the criteria of the Social Doctrine of the Church, but always keeping in mind the common good for the weaker, the abandoned and the mistreated of society, among whom is our ‘burdened and laid waste’ Mother Earth” (§54). A third line of action is going beyond a “Yes/No” approach to mining and oil extraction, and carefully analyzing the project’s benefits and harms from the perspective of human dignity and ecological balance” (§109). Finally is the commitment to make “all catechetical, liturgical and pastoral activity” highlight the “vital connection” between our faith and the care of Creation (§137), inviting families to pray for and with issues concerning mining (§139) and parishes to “take care of the caretakers of the common home,” too many of whom have been martyred for defending life (§142).

In 2021, Pope Francis created the Latin American Ecclesial Assembly, which comprises the Latin American bishops and representatives of the **Latin American Conference of Religious and Catholic Organizations**. The Assembly has issued several statements on mining, denouncing its culture of death and proposing alternative pathways for socio-economic development for local communities. See, e.g., the November 2021 message ‘[A Cry of Hope](#),’ which also mentions the need for the Catholic Church to decolonize itself and become less patriarchal.

In September 2024, organizations linked to Latin American bishops conferences went on an “**Integral Ecology Tour**” (“[Caravana por la Ecología Integral](#)”) to visit 10 cities in 6 European countries to make churches in Europe and European populations more aware of the ecological and human costs of mining, especially in the context of the energy transition. Though the initiative is not linked to bishops’ pronouncements, it signals the diffusion of experiences across the global Catholic Church, as well as the links and cooperation between bishops conferences and a large array of organizations which channel the voices of the vulnerable and trigger responsive actions.

In July 2025, CELAM published ‘[Pastoral Guidelines for Catholic Churches in the Face of Mining](#)’ (*Orientaciones Pastorales de las Iglesias Católicas frente a la Minería*), and signed by Latin American bishops whose diocese are affected by mining. It is a strongly worded document against ‘extractivism’, which it defines as an economic system which converts natural goods into capital. It denounces the prioritisation of financial interests over people’s lives. It distinguishes between a predatory, necessary and essential mining, which is limited to absolute needs within social and ecological justice. It advocates for the latter and a reduction in consumption, especially in the context of renewable energy. Noteworthy is its positioning of the Church on the side of the victims for there is no neutral position when the Church is called to mediate in mining conflicts: ‘The Church is called to put itself on the side of the human and non-human victims, keeping open an institutional dialogue alongside them, in the search for justice, inclusion and protagonism of those impoverished’ (p. 13). It calls for disinvestment of Church assets from financial institutions which support predatory mining.

The **Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM)**, the **Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC)**, and the **Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO)** have not yet produced documents akin to those of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops’ Council, but have released several statements:

- In 2020, Cardinal Bo of Yangon, Myanmar, and President of FABC, made a [statement](#) in reaction to a mining disaster in northern Myanmar: “Those who perished were

sacrificed on the altar of greed, by utter negligence and arrogance of companies that continue to dehumanize the poor of this land.”

- In 2024, SECAM convened a meeting to discuss the problems of conflict and extractives in Africa. The meeting produced a [concluding statement](#) denouncing mineral and other natural resource extraction fueling conflict, harming the environment, and inhibiting integral human development.
- In 2023, FCBCO made a [statement](#) following its meeting in the Fiji island of Suva. It mentions that “the Bishops of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands with their communities successfully stopped deep seabed mining,” but cautions that deep seabed mining activities remain a potential threat in several areas. In addition, the statement highlights the ecological consequences of ongoing mining, and the need to “recognise that our economic systems need to be in balance with the pulse of life.”

In June 2025, all the regional bishops’ conference of the ‘Global South’ (CELAM, SECAM and FBCO) issued a message on the occasion of COP30, ‘[A Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home](#): Ecological Conversion, Transformation and Resistance to False Solutions’. They call for an ‘ecological conversion that transforms the current model of development based on extractivism, technocracy and the commodification of nature’ (p. 8). They ‘condemn “green capitalism”, mining, and “energy monoculture”, which sacrifice communities and ecosystems; and we demand a radical economic transformation that favours conditions for life on Earth to thrive’ (p. 9), and call the parties gathered at COP to ‘promote a new development paradigm based on solidarity, social justice, co-operation and respect for planetary boundaries and the cultures of peoples, promoting agroecology, new economies and integral human development’ (p. 10). They issue a strong call for ‘joyful sobriety’ and resistance to consumerism, especially in the area of the energy transition. They see mining in the name of the energy transition as a ‘false solution’ to climate change (p. 22). Such mining ‘reinforces colonial extractivism, transforms entire territories into sacrifice zones, violates human rights and devastates nature in the name of false sustainability’ (p. 27).

NATIONAL CONFERENCES

Below follows a list of national Catholic bishops’ conferences which have issued official statements on mining. The list is far from being exhaustive and we invite readers to let us know of further documents or statements.

Argentina (Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, CEA)

- 2009, [Christmas message “No Había Lugar para Ellos”](#) [There was no room for them] Bishops from the region of Patagonia-Comahue note that “multinational companies do here what they are not allowed to do in developed or so-called first world countries” and “leave behind large human and environmental damage such as unemployment, decimated villages, depletion of natural reserves, deforestation, impoverishment of local agriculture, polluted rivers and a few social projects that cannot be sustained.” The bishops make ample references to the teachings of Pope Benedict XVI (“If you want to cultivate peace, care for creation” and “certain projects [...] transform nature full of life to a land of death”). They urge everyone “to organize to oppose projects that do not take into account the preservation of the environment and life, and not to let oneself be deceived by immediate benefits that put the future in jeopardy.”

- 2021, “[Comunicado ante el proyecto de Desarrollo Industrial Minero Metalífero Sustentable de la Provincia de Chubut](#)” [Statement about the Sustainable Industrial Mining Development project of the Province of Chubut]
CEA supports local bishops’ decision to oppose an industrial mining project in the Patagonian Province of Chubut in the name of ecosystem protection and Indigenous peoples rights.
- 2023, “[La minería del litio y su relación con las personas y la naturaleza](#)” [Lithium mining and its relation with people and nature]
Series of dialogues organized by CEA’s Justice and Peace Commission on mining activities in the Argentina-Chile-Bolivia lithium triangle.
- 2024, [Letter “El Territorio es Vida, No Mercancía](#)” [Territory is life, not a commodity]
Letter from CEA’s Indigenous Peoples Pastoral against a law which will promote sales of land to foreign investors and stimulate extractivism on Indigenous territories.

Australia (Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference, ACBC)

- 2002, [Social Justice Statement “A New Earth – The Environmental Challenge”](#)
Recognizes that “the vast wealth from agriculture and mining has come at the loss of native ecosystems and species, and land and water quality.” It calls on Australian Catholics to hear and follow John Paul II’s plea for an ecological conversion to greater ecological stewardship.
- 2017, [Joint Statement “Care of the Earth”](#)
The Catholic Bishop of Townsville and Anglican Bishop of North Queensland pledge common commitment to *Laudato Si’*.
- 2021, [Social Justice Statement “Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor”](#)
Includes a section on mining and the need to transition away from fossil fuel extraction. Calls for responsible practices in necessary mining operations and emphasizes the rights of Indigenous peoples in relation to mining on their lands.

Bolivia (Conferencia Episcopal Boliviana, CEB)

- 2012, [Pastoral Letter “El universo, don de Dios para la vida](#)” [The universe, gift of God for life]
Notes that the exploitation of oil and minerals is the major source of environmental degradation in Bolivia and calls on every person of good will “to promote a deep reflexion, a conversion of the mind and heart” to change deep-seated human practices that constrain the “communion between people and all the living beings of creation” (§13). Presents the life model of St. Francis of Assisi (§§73-75) and reiterates the main messages of the 2007 Aparecida document about ecological action as an integral component of the Church’s mission to evangelize.

Brazil (Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil, CNBB)

- 2020, “[Mensagem sobre as queimadas em território brasileiro](#)” [Message about fires in the Brazilian territory]
Denounces those mining firms and agribusinesses which have caused fires; calls on everyone to work towards “strong monitoring, investigation and accountability as well as an obligation to reforest, and reorganize the economic structure.”
- In 2019, a [Special Commission on Mining and Integral Ecology](#) was created to coordinate mining-related actions with the [Panamazonian Ecclesial Network](#) (Red Ecclesial Panamericana, REPAM), the [Indigenous Missionary Council](#) (Conselho Indigenista Missionário, CIMI) and the [Pastoral Land Commission](#) (Comissão Pastoral da Terra, CPT). Statements include the following:
 - 2021, [Communiqué “Em Defesa da Amazônia”](#) [In Defense of the Amazon]: Denounces new laws that are destroying local communities, rivers, and forests.
 - 2023, [Report on “Architecture of Impunity”](#): Documents the practices of mining companies and their relationships with Brazilian state institutions, with particular focus on the two tailings dams in the state of Minas Gerais that produced the 2015 Marianna and 2019 Brumadinho dam disasters.
- 2022, [Official Decree](#) published by Bishop José Ionilton Lisboa de Oliveira of Itacoatiara, in the state of Amazonas, and President of the Special Commission on Mining and Integral Ecology. Announces that the diocese will not accept “financial support, either in cash or in other goods, from politicians, logging companies, mining companies [...] that contribute to deforestation and to the expulsion of Indigenous peoples, ‘quilombolas’ [descendants of escaped African slaves], riverside communities, and small farmers from their lands.”

Canada (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, CCCB)

- 2017, [Letter to the Prime Minister and Canadian government](#)
Asks for better regulation of Canadian mining companies overseas: “We cannot remain indifferent to the cry of the poor or to the repercussions of environmental degradation on our common home. We cannot accept the unethical way Canadian mining companies have been operating in Latin America or other regions of the world, taking the absence of effective regulatory schemes as a reason to shirk their ethical responsibilities.”
- 2018, [Statement welcoming the decision by the Government of Canada on a Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise](#)

In 2013, the education campaign “A Voice for Justice” was launched by the episcopal conference’s development agency (Development and Peace) together with Caritas Internationalis to make the wider public aware of the consequences of Canadian mining companies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, demanding the creation of an ombudsperson to monitor operations of Canadian companies abroad. The campaign, which involved a process of listening to bishops from different mining-affected countries, was successful and the Canadian Bishops’ Conference welcomed the government decision to appoint such a person. Since then, [several campaigns](#) have addressed mining, such as “People and Planet First” (2021-22) demanding due diligence for Canadian companies operating abroad and “Stand for the Land” (2023-24) focusing on mining in Honduras.

Colombia (Conferencia Episcopal de Colombia, CEC)

- 2015, '[Carta pastoral sobre la minería](#)' [Pastoral Letter on Mining]
The bishops of the departments of Antioquia and Chocó describe the ecological and social consequences of mining in the region, and make an analysis of the situation in the light of *Laudato Si'*, calling for formation of local communities in integral ecology so that they can advocate for their rights and protect biodiversity.
- 2023, '[Towards a Social Pastoral of Reconciliation and Peace: Orientations for the Episcopal Conference of Colombia](#)'
This document by the Colombian bishops' [Pastoral Social](#), which works on including an ecological dimension to peacebuilding and reconciliation, cites extractivism as a threat to peace "which submits human communities to grave tensions and sufferings" (p. 56) and calls on everyone to "to work for an economic [and development] model that is based on equity, justice and high levels of social investment" but which is "not be confused with totalitarian socialist" ones that have "caused much damage in many countries" (p. 57).
- For further references, see chapter 3, "The Church in Colombia and extractives: pastoral accompaniment using an eco-theology of peace," by Sandra Polanía-Reyes and Héctor Fabio Henao in [Catholic Peacebuilding and Mining](#).

Costa Rica (Conferencia Episcopal de Costa Rica, CECR)

- 2010, '[Pronunciamento sobre la minería metálica a cielo abierto y el proyecto Las Crucitas](#)' [Statement about open-pit mining and the project Las Crucitas]
Urges the government to revoke a law declaring an open-pit metallic mine of "public interest," arguing that the project will violate the right to health of local populations and destroy biodiversity.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo, CENCO)

- A 'Commission épiscopale pour les ressources naturelles' (CERN) [Episcopal commission for natural resources] was created *ad hoc* in 2007 and established permanently in 2013 to document human rights violations in the mining sector, ensure accountability and transparency, as well as better redistribution so that Congolese people benefit from the DRC's vast amount of natural resources. Its 2021 [Project Report 'Promotion de l'engagement local en vue de la Sauvegarde du Bassin du Congo'](#) [Promotion of local engagement to safeguard the Congo Basin], for instance, presents discussions held at the fifth edition of the "Alternative Mining Meetings" and official statements produced in relation to it in its Annexe.

CERN has issued some other reports (in French) which can be found on the [Resource Library of the Catholic Peace-Building Network](#), such as a mapping of artisanal mining sites in the Province of North Kivu and territories of Beni and Lubero (2019), and a study of the contribution of the mining sector to the budget of the Province of Ituri (2019).

Ecuador (Conferencia Episcopal Ecuatoriana, CEE)

- 2012, [Declaration of Episcopal Conference ‘Cuidemos Nuestro Planeta’](#) [Let's Take Care of Our Planet]
Articulates the main messages of the Aparecida document in the context of mining in Ecuador, calling for respect of labor rights and health of mining workers, free, prior, and informed consent of local communities, as well as transparent and accurate environmental assessments. While pointing out that careful discernment is needed rather than a simple “yes” or “no” to mining, the bishops ask to bear in mind that “water is always more important than gold” as there can be life without gold but not without water.

Ghana (Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference, GCBC)

- 2012, [Communiqué of the Annual Plenary Assembly held at Koforidua in the Eastern Region of Ghana](#)
Deplores lack of access to drinkable water for many and the pollution resulting from the “frightening” but “prevailing indiscriminate mining activities by illegal and armed individuals and companies” in the country’s Eastern regions, which are sustained by “armed foreigners [... who] threaten our people on their land and, according to reports, even murder some of them who want to protect their farm lands”.
- 2012, [“Catholic Community Agenda for Change: An Advocacy Plan for the Period 2013-2016”](#)
Issued by the Department of Human Development of the National Catholic Secretariat, the agenda singles out illegal mineral and sand mining activities causing desertification and loss of livelihoods as a particular area of concern. It identifies actors that need to cooperate for improving the situation from mining communities, government agencies, religious bodies, traditional rulers, to the Ghana chamber of Mines.
- 2013, [Communiqué of the Plenary Assembly held in Synyani](#)
Renews “call for a conscious effort to save our arable land, water bodies, and forest reserves from destruction” caused by illegal mining.
- 2015, [Communiqué of the Plenary Assembly held at Bolgatanga, Upper East Region](#)
Notes how closely linked health of the nation and care of the environment are, and notes with regret “once again the persistent pollution of our water bodies, the littering of plastic waste everywhere, the careless felling of trees in our forests and savannah area and the rampant illegal mining (galamsey) operations in our towns and villages.” It calls on “our Laity and indeed all Ghanaians to rise up against this indiscriminate destruction of our environment and water bodies.”
- 2017, [Communiqué by the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference, issued at Ebenezer Presbyterian Church, Accra](#)
Observes with satisfaction government efforts to protect water bodies and forest reserves, as well as to end illegal mining. Mentions that illegal mining is “destroying the lives of ordinary Ghanaians, livestock and food stuff”, and increases illiteracy in affected areas by forcing “many of our youth [... to] abandon the classroom.” It calls officials to endorse the current government’s efforts against galamsey [illegal gold

mining] regardless of partisan affiliations and to increase efforts to make major rivers drinkable again. It also calls on pastors to “identify themselves with the campaign” and use their pulpit to educate about it.”

- 2017, “Let us Keep Our Bodies Holy: A Pastoral Letter on Illegal Mining” Expresses concerns about water pollution and deforestation as well as health risks posed to local communities. Condemns illegal small-scale mining, calling for stricter enforcement of regulations, urging greater transparency in mining contracts and operations, and greater accountability in the industry. Also calls for more equitable distribution of mining revenues, and the need for alternative livelihoods for mining-dependent communities.
- 2018, [Communiqué issued by the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference](#)
Takes note of “various efforts by some individuals, members of the Security Services, Politicians and Chiefs to thwart the fight against illegal mining” and demands “that Government, the Media Coalition against Galamsey, concerned Agencies and Institutions, and all Ghanaians should be bold and courageous to sustain the campaign and deal ruthlessly with the perpetrators of the menace” so that sources of livelihood not be “sacrificed for selfish interests.” It states that while one ought to pray to “God to change the hearts of these nation wreckers,” one “shall not tolerate such sinful acts against nature and posterity.”

India (Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, CCBI)

- 2017, ‘Appeal to Save Tribal Land and Culture’
Addresses mining impacts on tribal communities, highlighting issues of displacement, environmental degradation, and human rights of miners.

Nigeria (Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, CBCN)

- 2024, [Communiqué of the First Plenary Meeting of the CBCN at Durumi, Abuja](#)
Commends the government’s “decision to transfer some items, such as electricity and railways, from the exclusive list to the concurrent list. We urge that this be extended to such other areas of the economy like mining” for such “measures, along with transparency and accountability in governance, [...] promote social cohesion.”

Philippines (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, CBCP)

CBCP was the first body of the Catholic hierarchy issuing a statement dedicated to mining and extractivism. Since 1988, CBCP has sustained its ecological and social concerns with regard to mining consistently.

- 1988, [Pastoral Letter “What is Happening to our Beautiful Land?”](#)
Declares defending the environment to be “a matter of life and death.” Contains many of the themes that will appear more than 25 years later in *Laudato Si’*, such as interconnectedness: “An out-of-sight, out-of-mind mentality allows us to flush toxic waste and mine tailings into our rivers and seas in the mistaken belief that they can no

longer harm us. Because the living world is interconnected, the poison is absorbed by marine organisms. We in turn are gradually poisoned.” Sees the ecological being as a moral crisis, and calls for awareness that “[t]hrough our thoughtlessness and greed” that find expression in mining, “we have sinned against God and His creation.” It calls on the responsibility of each individual to act, treat land as a common home. It sees ecological action as an expression of spirituality and makes integral ecology a core mission of the Church that underpins everything else it does.

- 1998, [“A Statement of Concern on the Mining Act of 1995”](#)
Highlights the ill effects of mining operations on the environment and on the people, particularly Indigenous communities.
- 2006, [‘Mining Issues and Concerns: “Do not defile the land where you live and where I dwell” \(Book of Numbers 35:34\)’](#)
Advocates for the rights of Indigenous communities affected by mining and the protection of ancestral lands. Addresses the environmental impacts of mining, including deforestation, water contamination, and the loss of biodiversity. Calls for a moratorium on mining in ecologically sensitive areas and offers strong opposition to open-pit mining, emphasizing the need to prioritize ecological protection over short-term economic gains so that mining activities contribute to genuine economic development and social justice.
- 2008, [“Upholding the Sanctity of Life”](#)
Reaffirms CBCP’s rejection of irresponsible mining and illegal logging operations while also including the challenges of global warming and climate change among “the new threats to our environment.”
- 2019, [Pastoral Letter “An Urgent Call for Ecological Conversion, Hope in the Face of Climate Emergency”](#)
Deplores continued threats to remaining forests and biodiversity by extractive mining operations and the building of dams (“Respect for God’s creation is disregarded when irresponsible mining practices are allowed to continue.”). Notes that there is evidence that all “26 mining operations ordered closed or suspended” two years earlier still extract, and that the few legally operating mining companies, “many of which are also owned by political leaders, reap the benefits from mineral extraction” whereas “[t]he rural poor remain poor” and see their livelihoods destroyed. It proposes a set of concrete actions, including divestment from mining portfolios and active citizen information and empowerment to influence upcoming mining bills.
- In 2021, [Filipino bishops criticized President Rodrigo Duterte's decision to lift a nine-year moratorium on new mining deals](#) which would exponentially destroy the Mindanao River Basin and severely affect nine provinces with more than 3.5 million population.
- 2022, [Pastoral Letter “A Call for Unity and Action amid a Climate Emergency and Planetary Crisis”](#)
Proactively endorses and calls for implementation of internationally negotiated climate goals, adding further action points to those mentioned in the 2019 pastoral letter. Reiterates the call to divest Church resources “from extractive industries, including logging and mining, with haste,” and asserts “a CBCP-initiated non-acceptance policy

of donations of whatever kind, from owners or operators and any representative of extractive industries,” because it is “unacceptable that finances so graciously provided to us are used for such industries. Financial resources must be used solely for the Common Good, Integrity of Creation, and the Glory of our Creator.” The letter calls on the entire Church “to act on ecological financial stewardship” and lead by example.

- 2023, [Open Letter to end Mining in Palawan](#)
Calls to “ban the expansion and extension of mining operations” in Palawan, the Philippine’s “last ecological frontier” (other regions have already taken steps to shut down mining operations). Notes that Indigenous peoples and ordinary farmers are the most vulnerable. The letter’s release coincides with 400 years of Christian life on the island and is endorsed by many lay people, priests, academics, and social movements.
- 2024, [Plenary Assembly approved major resolutions to strengthen integral ecology campaigns](#)
CBCP resolved to uphold its commitment to divest from financial institutions engaged in environmentally destructive businesses, including extractive mining and industries that are considered anti-life, by 2025. It affirms its earlier commitment to refuse donations from individuals and companies engaged in environmentally harmful activities. It encourages the public to report to the Conference “any bishop or diocese that is probably accepting donations from specific businesses or industries involved in activities that are destructive to the environment.”

South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini (Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference, SACBC)

- 1999, [“Pastoral Statement on the Environmental Crisis”](#)
Notes that “human irresponsibility,” which includes irresponsible mining, has led to “massive health problems millions of people are facing as a result of the dumping of hazardous waste next to their homes,” illness of workers some of which “even died as a result of exposure to chemicals,” and unequal access to water and energy among the population. Calls for “prompt and creative response” by interest groups and NGOs to influence legislation. Commends the Church’s and individuals’ efforts aimed at redressing “human abuse of God’s creation.”
- 2022, Statement by the SACBC Justice and Peace Commission [“We stand with the poor when multinational corporations violate their human rights”](#)
Notes that the Church needs to stand with those working in the mines advocating for their rights, but also to demand justice for ex-gold miners suffering from silicosis, even in filing lawsuits. Calls that wealth and benefits from mining be shared with the poor and used for the benefit of the sick of the nation.
- 2023, [South African bishops file lawsuit against the Anglo American Group](#)
Seeking recourse for sick miners and families of workers who died after contracting pneumoconiosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, members of SACBC have through their Justice and Peace Commission launched a lawsuit against AngloAmerican. This represents a significant attempt to address the historical issues faced by those working in extraction more generally.

United States of America (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB)

- 1991, Pastoral Statement “[Renewing the Earth](#)”
First official statement by U.S. bishops dealing with environmental matters. Draws attention to the ethical dimensions of the ecological crisis, explores the link between ecology and poverty, and examines the implications for human life and dignity.
- 2012, “[Backgrounder on the Extractive Industries](#)”
Notes that the extraction of copper, lumber, or diamonds is “a central feature of modern economies, one that creates new opportunities and imposes new burdens,” as can be seen in the DRC (on which the USCCB produced its own backgrounder), calling the U.S. government, companies, and Catholics each with their own list of proposed actions to contribute to making mining practices respectful to people and planet.
- 2015, USCCB Department of Justice, Peace & Human Development, “[The Devastating Effect of Irresponsible Mining Practices](#)”
This post is part of a blog created after the publication of *Laudato Si’* seeking to inform U.S. Catholics. It urges them to pursue integral ecology, and in this case narrates the “United with God, We Hear a Cry” conference held at the Vatican in July 2015 (see above).
- 2021, “[Socially Responsible Investment Guidelines for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#)”
States that “[t]he USCCB should avoid investing in companies whose activities directly contribute to depletion and/or degradation of available water, without mitigating these impacts, and in companies engaged in extraction of natural resources that do not demonstrate formal and/or informal compliance with the principles of the [Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative](#) insofar as this resource does not contradict the teaching of the Catholic Church.”
- Expressions of Solidarity with Mining-Affected Dioceses Across the Globe
 - The USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace through its chair expressed solidarity with several other bishops and episcopal bodies across the globe dealing with harmful consequences of mining practices. There was, for example, a 2008 [letter expressing solidarity with the Church in the DRC](#), a country “divided into ‘dwarf’ states” by illegal mining, “where there is no rule of law and militias act with impunity,” and a 2008 [letter expressing solidarity with the Church in Guatemala](#) where workers together with members of the Church protested inhumane working conditions in the mining sector.

In line with these expressions of solidarity, at a 2013 meeting in Tampa, Florida, representatives of the Episcopal Conferences of the United States and of Canada explicitly support CELAM’s initiatives with regards to extractive industries. This is a consequence of five emblematic cases of human rights violations caused by extractive industries presented by CELAM in public hearings at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in Washington D.C. in March 2015. The hearings were [actively supported by the USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace](#). It was the first time that the Catholic Church of the Americas participated in a forum at that level.

- Lobbying Mining-Related Legislation
 - Most crucially, during 2010, USCCB and Catholic Relief Services successfully lobbied Congress to legally require companies listed in the U.S. stock exchange to publish their payments to governments in countries where they extract minerals, as well as to report on their sources of gold, tin, tungsten, and coltan.. USCCB remained engaged in [supporting effective implementation](#) of these provisions and [preventing their repeal](#), including by communicating to Congress the need to continue funding regulatory agencies, such as the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission.
 - In 2011, the USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace [urged Congress to enshrine environmental standards in the Free Trade Agreement with Colombia](#) so as to minimize the often severe and negative impacts of extractive projects on rural communities.
 - In 2014, after an official journey to Central America, Bishop Pates of Des Moines in the name of the USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace, [asked Secretary of State John Kerry to extend home standards to the conduct of U.S. and Canadian mining companies abroad](#), to end their destruction of the environment and public health."
 - The USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace in 2017 [urged Congress not to suppress the so-called "Congo Conflict Minerals Act"](#), given that the Church through 20 monitoring units in Eastern DRC observes "the unsafe, dangerous and deplorable conditions under which many people, including children, work," noting that "[w]ith armed guards standing over them, laborers are little more than slave labor." Also highlights the "terrible environmental damage caused by these mines, leaching toxins into the soil and water so that villagers have no safe drinking water and their farmlands are destroyed." Not only are these social costs "unacceptable" and absent from "the balance sheets of corporations," African diamond, metal, and mineral exports have for too long been "more of a curse than a blessing." The Committee asks that the Congo Conflict Minerals Act remain in force to make the U.S. act as "a global 'Good Samaritan' to the millions of people in Eastern Congo" and "reduce conflict overseas that creates instability for the entire world."
 - The USCCB's Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development in 2024 [urged Congress](#) to take special care for continued investment in "tribal programs [and] reclamation of abandoned mines and wells."

Zambia (Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops, ZCCB)

- 2023, [Pastoral Statement on the State of the Nation](#)
 Urges the government "to review mining concessions and tax holidays given to multilateral corporations" so that the industry contributes to the national treasury as it should, increasing public shareholding and local ownership. Notes that "[d]ue to increasing use of technology, mining employs significantly lower numbers of people today." Demands "full disclosure of all bilateral and multilateral agreements as well as transparency in publication of the mining agreements with investors so that the Zambian people know what their public leaders are signing on their behalf."

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