Responsible Resource Extraction

At the Joint Assembly, Lutherans and Anglicans voted 98% in favour of a resolution on responsible resource extraction, which calls on individuals, congregations, and the national church to address the environmental and human rights impacts of mining and oil exploration.

Many of us are connected to these industries. We work in them, or have family who do. We see their contributions to communities and to charity. We understand that they are a very significant part of our economy.

But this is not the whole story. When National Bishop Johnson visited Peru recently, LWF partners told her how their communities, water, and environment had been affected by a Canadian-owned mine. They wondered what the ELCIC was doing about it. “I felt that question very deeply,” she told the Joint Assembly.

This story is played out elsewhere. A Canadian company in El Salvador wants to open a cyanide-leaching gold mine in the Rio Lempa watershed, which supplies drinking water for more than half the country. In the Philippines, indigenous people who live near a Canadian mine are concerned about impacts on food and water security, their health, and land that they consider sacred.

In Canada, we wonder if recent legislative changes, urged on by the extraction sector, go too far. Bill C-38 reduced the time frame of environmental assessment for resource projects. Bill C-45 removed 99% of Canada’s freshwater rivers, lakes, and ponds from crucial environmental oversight.

There are also human rights impacts. Indigenous peoples have the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) when resource extraction occurs on their traditional territories. But First Nations in Alberta, who say they have not seen the economic benefits they were promised from the oil sands, are now concerned that their right to FPIC is not being respected as the projects expand. First Nations along the proposed Northern Gateway pipeline route in B.C. have similar concerns.


In the Democratic Republic of Congo, our colleagues recently met women who are victims of rape as a weapon of the war over control of Congo’s mineral wealth. In Guatemala, a Canadian mining company’s security personnel have been accused in the killing of a Mayan leader who was critical of mining activities.

In this context, our neighbours are asking us to respond. Those with whom we are one body in Christ are challenging us to make the connection between our jewellery and gasoline and their experiences of ecological harm, displacement, and serious human rights violations. We have at times closed our hearts to others’ struggle and pain — particularly to the experiences of indigenous peoples. But here we have a moment to be true to a commitment to reconciliation.

We will do so because of our biblical faith. Discerning where there is injustice, acting prophetically to expose and liberate and restore, is a matter of biblical faithfulness. Luke 4:16–21 tells of the beginning of Jesus’ ministry: …The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and…to let the oppressed go free….

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