



9 August 2017

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.  
Prime Minister of Canada  
House of Commons  
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Dear Prime Minister,

I read with interest the news of your audience with Pope Francis in Rome this past May, during which you discussed many issues, including the impact of industry on creation and humanity itself. These effects are among the concerns closest to the heart of the Catholic Church in Canada, particularly when they involve Indigenous Peoples.

Most recently, the Catholic Bishops of Latin America have brought to our attention their deep concerns regarding the presence of Canadian extraction companies with operations in Latin America. Many of these companies are directly responsible for serious environmental degradation and human rights' violations. It is particularly unfortunate that their commercially driven interests have direct ill consequences on Indigenous populations whose ancestral lands are being ravaged and depleted by unethical, unjust and irresponsible ways of mining.

This blatant disregard for the land and the people who inhabit it would not be tolerated if the voices of those affected were not silenced by those with political influence whose financial interests are tied to these operations. In Honduras, Brazil, and elsewhere in Latin America, individuals and communities have been kept down from defending their land, water, and livelihoods. It is well known that the control, extraction, processing, and trade of these resources finance armed groups whose exploitation of power hinders and endangers vulnerable populations. We have heard stories of how threats, violence, extortion and even murder have been used to advance the progress of big business and industry to the detriment – both human and economic – of the poor.

We, as Canadians, are among the privileged. 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.

It is up to all of us – government, corporations, investors, local authorities, workers and consumers – to change our attitudes and practices if we are ever to live in a world in which the creation of wealth from the fruits of the earth does not blind us to the origin and purpose of these goods, which is to advance the conditions of life for all. As Pope Francis has clearly pointed out, natural ecology is closely tied to human ecology, so that our treatment of the natural world is inextricably linked to how we view other human beings, how we envisage the moral shaping of society, and how we relate to God (cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato si* [On Care for Our Common Home], Vatican City, 2015, no 5 ff.).

Your government's recent interest in reinvigorating Canada's foreign policy was the subject of a letter I sent to the Minister of Foreign Affairs dated 29 June 2017 in which I expressed my dismay with her speech to the House of Commons on Canadian foreign policy on 9 June 2017. Responses to my letter in news media from both the Minister herself and from the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, who recently met with the Archbishop of Sherbrooke, the Most Rev. Luc Cyr, have suggested a willingness on the part of your Cabinet to deepen this important discussion with faith leaders.

We invite you to consider the enclosed Open Letter (attachment 1) from nearly 200 Latin American and international organizations in which important concerns about Canada's global mining sector are raised. This letter, dated 25 April 2016, was sent well over a year ago and is still awaiting a response. Those who signed it, including members of the ecumenical *Churches and Mining Network (Red Iglesias y Minería)*, hope for change based on the commitment that you, as Prime Minister, and your government have made towards the adoption of a legislative framework that would hold state agencies and companies to account for abuses related to Canadian mining companies' overseas operations. Their suggestions include:

- The creation of objective and impartial means (such as an ombudsperson) to monitor and investigate complaints of abuses in connection with Canadian mining companies abroad;
- Access to Canadian courts that would allow violations of environmental and human rights' legislation by Canadian mining companies operating abroad to be prosecuted under Canadian law;
- An end to Canadian government action, whether through aid, trade, technical assistance or diplomacy, that seeks to influence the adoption or modification of regulatory frameworks in recipient countries for extractive projects; and
- A halt to the pursuit of free trade and investment agreements that favour Canadian mining companies over people and the environment, in particular an end to investor-state international arbitration mechanisms, which foreign investors use to protect their investments and to evade regulation or accountability for abuses.

More than two years ago, my predecessor as President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Most Reverend Paul-André Durocher, Archbishop of Gatineau, issued the enclosed letter of support (attachment 2) to the then President of the Episcopal Council of Latin America (CELAM) as an expression of our solidarity with its decision to appear on 19 March 2015, in Washington, D.C., before a tribunal of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) regarding the ethical and moral implications of projects involving the extractive industries in Latin America. The Most Reverend Donald Bolen, then Bishop of Saskatoon, and who is still Chairman of the CCCB Commission for Justice and Peace, was present for the tribunal hearing as a further expression of our solidarity. A copy of the letter was forwarded to the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, the Honourable Rob Nicholson, in which Archbishop Durocher pointed out how our Conference has been concerned for some years about Canadian connections with the extractive industries active in Latin America.

The *Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace – Caritas Canada* has also repeatedly called for access to justice for communities affected by the activities of Canadian mining companies overseas, a call that has been supported and echoed by the Bishops of Canada. Over 80,000 Canadians joined *Development and Peace* in their 2013 Voice for Justice Campaign, calling for an independent ombudsperson for the overseas extractive sector.

When will the Government of Canada respond to these repeated calls for improved oversight of Canadian extractive companies operating abroad? I look forward to hearing from you, and thank you for your attention to our ongoing concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas Crosby".

(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI  
Bishop of Hamilton  
President of the Canadian Conference  
of Catholic Bishops

Encl.

- c.c.:
- The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs
  - The Honourable James Gordon Carr, Minister of Natural Resources
  - The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs