



Summary and Conclusions Panel Discussion, 'Extractives in Latin America'

On 31 October 2017, Pax Christi International and CIDSE organised a panel discussion hosted by COMECE in Brussels titled, 'Extractives in Latin America: grass roots and international community responses', which was attended by indigenous people, civil society representatives and policy makers. The participants learned about the human rights crisis in Latin America linked with the extractives industry, while also learning about indigenous people's nonviolent resistance. The panelists moved on to discuss the role the EU and member states could play when addressing the impact of transnational corporations, both at EU and international levels.

Context

Many Latin American communities are heavily affected by the activities of companies who exploit oil, gas, gold, silver, iron, copper, tin, and other resources. Worryingly, the situation has deteriorated in recent years, as extractive activities are substantially increasing. This increase generates irreversible and negative impacts on livelihoods, ecosystems and the human rights of local communities, often causing conflicts. While many Latin American governments have been supporting the practices of extractive corporations through economic incentives and legal changes, alternatives exist.

Presentations

Fr. Olivier Poquillon OP (General Secretary, COMECE) pointed out in his welcoming words that the issue of extractives and the access to natural resources are of great concern to His Holiness Pope Francis, as expressed through his [encyclical, *Laudato Si'*](#). Access to natural resources is often a critical element in initiating and fueling armed conflicts. The care for creation, respect for others and willingness to dialogue are key elements in addressing this issue when it comes to the Latin American region. Moreover, he underlined that the European Union (EU) is a peace project and has a particular responsibility in this regard.

Ms. Martha Ines Romero (Regional Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean, Pax Christi International, Colombia) presented the regional context and her work in supporting communities in strengthening capacities for nonviolent action. She set out how the extractives industry brings many challenges, such as escalating conflicts with local communities, increasing competition over access to natural resources and environmental degradation. She also shared that the Latin American region has become one of the most deadly places for environmental activists.

Ms. Mikeas Sánchez Gomez (Representative of the Zoque indigenous community & indigenous movement, ZODEVITE, Mexico) shared with participants that the Zoque territories and people are threatened by the activities of Latin American, North American and European companies in oil, mining and geoparks. Her community has been, despite threats, nonviolently resisting extractives through actions such as the organising of assemblies, self-consultations within communities, collecting signatures against companies, political mobilisation and the creation of ZODEVITE. In several cases, their actions have led to the suspension of extractives activities by companies.

Ms. Tove Sövdahl Gant (Policy Officer Indigenous Peoples, EU External Action Service) set out that the EU has recently assessed its external policies on indigenous people. The conclusion was that there is room for improvement, such as by using the UN declaration on indigenous people as a basis for all actions and policies, paying special attention to women, children and people with disabilities, applying safeguards such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, promoting concerns of indigenous people in the context of trade agreements and continuing to support partner countries in implementing the ILO convention on indigenous people.

Mr. Stefan Reinhold (Corporate Regulation & Extractives Officer, CIDSE) presented various initiatives the EU has taken to tackle injustices related to natural resource extraction, such as the Transparency and Accountability Directives, the Non-Financial Reporting Directive, the Conflict Minerals Regulation and other similar attempts at the national or UN level. He then reported back from the UN Binding Treaty negotiations in Geneva and stressed the great opportunities this process brings. Pointing out the inconsistency of various initiatives taking place at different levels and focusing on different impacts or sectors of transnational corporations, he called on the EU and member states to recognise and seize this unique opportunity to show leadership on an issue crucial to many European citizens.

Conclusions and ways forward

Although EU and international legislation and policies have been adopted related to the problem of extractives in Latin America, there was a clear call from the Latin American participants to the international community to take more action supporting local and national nonviolent struggles. In the presentations and discussions some of the following points of actions were mentioned:

- To put the problems of extractives in Latin America high on the agendas, hear the voices of the affected communities and put pressure on European companies and Latin American governments for their human rights to be respected.
- To support free, prior and informed consent consultations with indigenous communities.
- To protect human rights defenders opposing the extractives industry in Latin America.
- To carry out ex-ante and ex-post impact assessments with regard to EU trade agreements and the follow-up of sustainable development clauses with Latin American governments.
- To improve implementation of policy initiatives at the EU and international level regarding companies and human rights, amongst others through their harmonisation.
- To call on the EU to take a constructive approach in negotiations on a UN binding treaty on business and human rights for a strong legal instrument requiring transnational companies to undertake due diligence while also guaranteeing the primacy of environmental and human rights and clauses over trade and investment agreements, and ensuring equal access to justice for victims of human rights abuses.

More information

- [Video screened about the Zoque community](#)
- [Videos of the presentations by the panel lists](#)
- [CIDSE publication on the potential of a UN Treaty on transnational corporations and other businesses \(April, 2017\)](#)

- [CIDSE publication on the new UN treaty on business and human rights and how to improve access to remedy by victims \(September 2017\)](#)
- [Pax Christi International position paper on extractives in Latin America \(September, 2017\)](#)