



Fair and Equitable Dialogue for Conflict Transformation

PREPARED BY

Latin American ecclesial networks in
contexts of extractivism





Reflections of Latin American Ecclesial Networks in Contexts of Extractivism

Introduction

We are living through a moment of extreme gravity for our planet and for the entire community of life. As affirmed in the Call for Climate Justice and Our Common Home, endorsed by the Catholic Episcopal Conferences and Councils of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, we are now dangerously close to tipping points in the climate and environmental crisis.

There is a convergence of voracious interests and needs that seek to preserve and expand the current structures of economic and financial power, fuel a growing demand for energy and the goods of the Earth at any cost, and sustain a powerful military system that frequently accompanies dynamics of aggression, dispossession, and plunder.

Pope Leo XIV recognizes in the biblical symbol of Babel an eloquent image of this technocratic logic of power:

“Babel thus reveals the limits of every construction that, however grand it may be, arises from the absolutization of the human and from its claim to self-sufficiency, sacrifices the dignity of persons in the name of efficiency, and aspires to reach heaven without the blessing of God.”¹

^[1] Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas*, n. 7.

Unless humanity urgently succeeds in bringing about profound transformations, the deterioration of the conditions that make life possible will continue to accelerate, with increasingly serious consequences for present and future generations.



Faced with a scenario of such magnitude, it might seem natural to concentrate all efforts on influencing those who today possess the greatest political, economic, and financial decision-making power. Yet the Gospel and the Church's social tradition invite us to recognize another path, equally realistic and profoundly transformative: to begin by listening to those who suffer the consequences of this model and to discover in them a privileged place for discernment, hope, and historical renewal. This listening can then extend toward the spheres of decision-making, influencing them from the logic of weakness, according to Saint Paul's axiom: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10).

More recently, in a video message addressed to the community of Lampedusa in preparation for his visit, Pope Leo XIV stated: "History is devastated by the powerful, but it is saved by the humble, the righteous, and the martyrs, in whom goodness shines forth and authentic humanity endures and is renewed."²

^[2] <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/it/messages/pont-messages/2025/documents/20250912-videomessaggio-progetto-unesco.html>

For this reason, through an initiative of the Latin American ecclesial networks and organizations CBJP, Churches and Mining, Pax Christi, REGCHAG, REMAM, and REPAM,³ through their respective bishop presidents or advisers, this document seeks to offer a deeper reflection on dialogue and the Church's commitment to social transformation.

This contribution is offered in a spirit of communion, discernment, and collaboration, from a synodal perspective that seeks to listen to and integrate the voices of the peripheries, while remaining open to encounter with other experiences and perspectives. Above all, this text arises from the accompaniment of communities affected by extractivism, a reality that continues to generate pollution, displacement, conflict, violations of rights, and various forms of violence throughout our *Patria Grande*.

In these territories, questions frequently arise that also challenge the Church: Where do so many aggressions against our territories come from? Who finances them? What interests sustain the threats against those who defend life, the common goods, and the rights of communities?

We seek to enter into dialogue with the affected communities, allowing ourselves to be guided by their own experience and by the example of their processes of nonviolent resistance and organization. We are convinced that the deepest transformations cannot take place solely within the grammar, rules, and habits of power, which always tend to justify and reproduce themselves.

For this reason, courageous decisions and profound transformations are required in models of development, production, and consumption, as well as in the structures of power that today shape the lives of peoples and our Common Home. From this perspective, the call recalled by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* (n. 5), drawing on Saint John Paul II, resonates with particular relevance today: to promote “profound changes [...] in the consolidated structures of power that govern today's society.”

³ CBJP: Brazilian Commission for Justice and Peace; REGCHAG: Gran Chaco and Guaraní Aquifer Network; REMAM: Mesoamerican Ecclesial Network; REPAM: Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network.

Reflections on Dialogue

Various actors often affirm that dialogue constitutes the most appropriate way to resolve conflicts and build consensus. From the business sector and government actors to affected communities and social movements, all recognize its importance. However, the term “dialogue” often takes on different meanings depending on the experience and position that each actor occupies in social reality.

A close-up photograph of a purple grass seed head, likely a type of Pennisetum, showing the intricate details of the seed heads and the green leaves. The background is blurred, focusing attention on the plant.

A company's understanding of dialogue does not necessarily coincide with that of a community affected by an extractive project. Expectations, needs, and possibilities for influence are often very different. Therefore, rather than generically affirming the need for dialogue, it is important to discern the conditions that allow it to effectively contribute to justice, reconciliation, and the transformation of conflicts.

From our pastoral and social experience, we would like to highlight six dimensions that we consider fundamental for an authentically transformative dialogue.

1. Recognizing Power Asymmetries

A just dialogue requires an adequate interpretation of reality and of the existing relations of power among the different actors, without relativizing power asymmetries.

There is an illegitimate use of power when certain actors are able to exert disproportionate influence over decisions that affect the lives of other social groups. In numerous socio-environmental conflicts, the central question posed to communities is not whether a particular economic project should be carried out or not, but rather under what conditions communities will have to accept it. When this occurs, the very starting point of dialogue becomes problematic, since the alternatives have already been limited by national and local powers, with the interference or influence of transnational corporate powers.

Often, in the name of dialogue, actors with profoundly unequal responsibilities, decision-making capacities, access to information, and resources are brought together in the same space. This undermines the possibility of fairer and more meaningful participation.

Likewise, corporate decisions often respond to institutional, financial, and regulatory dynamics that exceed the decision-making capacity of the individuals representing companies in dialogue spaces. Therefore, it is important to consider not only the interlocutors who are present, but also the structures and constraints that influence the decisions that must subsequently be made.

2. The Church as Guarantor of the Voice of the Victims

The Church cannot be considered a neutral observer and mediator in contexts of conflict. Its commitment to dialogue arises from the preferential option for the poor and from the evangelical conviction that the dignity of the most vulnerable constitutes a fundamental criterion for social and pastoral discernment.



From Sacred Scripture, which highlights the bold nonviolent actions of Jesus in a context of oppression and domination over his people, through the tradition of the Church Fathers and up to the contemporary Magisterium, we find a constant invitation to listen to the cry of those who suffer. This orientation appears clearly in recent documents such as *Laudato Si'*, *Dilexi Te*, and *Magnifica Humanitas*.⁴

Likewise, various currents of popular education, including the approach proposed by Paulo Freire,⁵ remind us that processes of social transformation require recognizing the leading role of those who experience situations of exclusion, vulnerability, or injustice.

Pope Leo XIV reaffirms the importance of dialogue (MH 219–223) and of a culture of negotiation oriented toward encounter and convergence, in the context of diplomacy among States. However, he first emphasizes an essential condition for every process of reconciliation: adopting the perspective of the victims. As the encyclical states: “We cannot remain at the level of abstract analysis. As Pope Francis reminded us, we must ‘touch the flesh’ of those who suffer: look at their faces, listen to their stories, acknowledge their wounds” (MH 216).

Therefore, the dialogue promoted by the Church cannot dispense with giving priority to listening to those who suffer the consequences of the conflicts it seeks to address.

3. Giving Victims Authority, Voice, and the Opportunity to Make Proposals

Victims cannot be considered merely as people invited to the table of our dialogues, much less as distant references or people consulted only indirectly. It is necessary that they occupy a place of recognition and authority in the listening processes promoted by the Church, as well as being given real spaces for direct expression in the dialogues that are convened.

The Church is called to give special priority to processes of listening, communion, and exchange among the affected communities themselves and impoverished sectors, rather than to spaces of dialogue broadened to include other social actors.

^[4] Cf. LS 158; DT 16–23; MH 216.

^[5] Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogía del oprimido* (2nd ed.). Siglo XXI Editores.



From the perspective of integral ecology, this listening must also open itself to the non-human victims of the socio-environmental crisis, recognizing that the devastation of ecosystems, species, and territories is part of the same logic of violence that simultaneously affects peoples and our Common Home. As *Laudato Si'* reminds us, Mary “has compassion for the suffering of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world ravaged by human power” (LS 241). Ecclesial listening is therefore called to welcome both the cry of the impoverished and the cry of other creatures wounded by current models of production and consumption.

We value dialogue when it constitutes an effective opportunity for transforming social relations and weakening existing asymmetries. In this sense, we can speak of a “dialogue oriented toward transformation” or an “emancipatory dialogue,” insofar as it contributes to greater justice and equity in relationships and in the distribution of power.

4. Ensuring Transparency and Universal Access to Information

Often, one of the main obstacles preventing communities from defending their rights in the face of large corporate projects is the lack of adequate, timely, and accessible information about what is being planned for their territories.

On various occasions, alliances between political and corporate actors generate prior agreements that are subsequently presented to communities when already in the implementation phase, while requesting processes of dialogue that seek instrumental legitimization through acceptance rather than genuine deliberation. In this sense, transparency and equitable access to information must be guaranteed before any process of negotiation or decision-making.

The international legal framework offers various tools aimed at protecting communities potentially affected by high-impact projects, including the precautionary principle, the reversal of the burden of proof, and free, prior, and informed consent.

5. Situating Dialogue in Territories Affected by Conflict

General declarations of principles, and even more so self-declarations of sustainability or ethical responsibility by companies, may prove insufficient if they are not accompanied by verifiable mechanisms in the territories.

Various reports prepared by affected communities and independent research teams have shown, in numerous cases, the limitations or inconsistencies of certain corporate reports, reinforcing the need for criteria of external verification and local participation.

Along these same lines, the Message of the Catholic Episcopal Conferences and Councils of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia in view of COP30 warns of the risk of false solutions promoted by economic and political actors in response to the socio-environmental crisis. Among these, it mentions the financialization of nature, the expansion of mining in the name of the energy transition, and various forms of energy monoculture. According to the document, these initiatives, often conceived far from the territories and imposed on local communities, “perpetuate the system of exploitation, ignoring the need for structural change.”⁶

Therefore, genuine dialogue must also take place in the territories where conflicts become visible, where impacts are experienced on a daily basis, and where communities resist and care for their territories and their culture, formulating concrete demands for prevention, reparation, mitigation, or, in some cases, for the review and reconsideration of the projects themselves.

As the document Catholic Vision of Mining, prepared by the University of Notre Dame in collaboration with the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and Caritas Internationalis, states: “Decisions about mining that affect local populations should not be imposed by distant authorities without the consent and participation of those who are directly affected.”⁷

Holding dialogue meetings far from the territories may contribute to general reflection, but it can remain disconnected from concrete reality and fail to effectively contribute to the transformation of conflicts or to the protection of ecosystems affected by the extractive industry.

^[6]<https://www.vaticannews.va/es/vaticano/news/2025-07/justicia-climatica-documento-celam-africa-asia-cop-30.html>

^[7]https://www.humandevlopment.va/content/dam/sviluppoumano/news/2025-news/10-octobre/webinar-catholic-approaches-to-mining/catholic_approaches_to_mining_2025_spanish_digital.pdf

The CELAM Pastoral Guidelines of the Catholic Churches in the Face of Mining, as well as the document Catholic Vision of Mining, emphasize the importance of free, prior, and informed consent and impact assessments as central elements of any process of discernment.

6. Monitoring and Controlling Business Actions through Laws and Public Institutions

Sustainability and respect for human rights by companies cannot depend exclusively on voluntary initiatives or corporate goodwill. It is essential that the regulation of economic activities in territories be based on the effective enforcement of laws, as well as on regulatory frameworks capable of responding to the urgency of the current socio-environmental crisis.

Among these initiatives, for years our networks, together with allied organizations from different continents, have promoted the adoption within the United Nations of a Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights, as well as the development and strengthening of corporate due diligence frameworks in the countries and regions where companies operate and invest.

It is necessary to strengthen the institutions responsible for supervising, evaluating, and enforcing these norms, as well as to clearly identify the actors with competence in these processes. In this regard, the role of the democratic State and of the institutions of justice is irreplaceable.

Likewise, the Church's role in the pastoral accompaniment of communities in their territories is fundamental. In various contexts, communities face situations of political corruption, institutional capture, or collusion between political and economic actors.⁸ In this regard, the Church accompanies and supports the legitimate demands of communities for just public policies, greater institutional transparency, and the effective respect of human and socio-environmental rights.

In his teaching, Pope Francis insists on the importance of the “great paths of dialogue,” but always links them to responsible political processes at the international, national, and local levels.⁹

^[8] Czerny, M., Colacino, L., The Church and Pastoral Theology in Conflicts over Natural Resources: The Case Study of Juan Antonio López, *Religions* 2026, 17, 636.

^[9] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, nn. 164–198.

Conclusion

In recent years, the Church has undertaken important paths of listening, discernment, and dialogue, with remarkable potential to open itself evangelically to new pastoral insights and practices in the face of the increasingly complex challenges of our time. The synodal journey we are undertaking has made possible unusual encounters and, in many cases, profoundly challenging ones, renewing the conviction that the Spirit continues to guide the Church wherever there is a sincere willingness to listen, learn, and walk together.

From this same spirit of communion and shared responsibility, we offer these reflections as a contribution to ecclesial discernment. The considerations presented here do not seek to limit the processes of dialogue promoted by the Church, but rather to help them respond ever more fully to their evangelical vocation, paying particular attention to power asymmetries, the centrality of human and non-human victims, and listening to the communities that experience socio-environmental conflicts on a daily basis.

In this regard, we particularly value initiatives that can contribute to what Pope Francis called “multilateralism from below,”¹⁰ understood as the construction of processes of dialogue and decision-making that are closer to the concrete realities of territories and to the active participation of those who inhabit and care for them.

^[10] Pope Francis, *Laudate Deum*, n. 38.



We trust that, by walking along this path, the prophetic Church will continue to offer the world a credible witness of hope, promoting a culture of encounter that does not evade conflicts, but rather contributes to transforming them through truth, justice, human dignity, and care for our Common Home.

In Christ,

September 2026.

