

Mining industry: It is not acceptable to "sacrifice the well-being of a few for the benefit of the many," says Alistair Dutton of Caritas Internationalis

In an interview with I.MEDIA, Caritas Internationalis Secretary General Alistair Dutton presents the new *Framework for Reflection, Planning and Action* published on 21 October 2025 to support populations affected by mining. This 40-page document – to which the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development contributed – proposes lines of action, in particular to guarantee the “genuine consent” of local communities in the face of the “immense” power of multinationals, Dutton explains. He adds that the Catholic Church “does not impose solutions; it amplifies the voice of the poor”.

Why are Caritas and the Catholic Church involved in the issue of mining?

Caritas and the Catholic Church as a whole are interested in the issue of mining because today it represents much more than an economic activity. Throughout the world, mining operations that do not comply with environmental, social and human rights standards have led to displacement, pollution and violence affecting some of the poorest communities. Entire ecosystems are being destroyed, and with them the livelihoods and cultural roots of the people.

For the Church, this is not just an environmental or social problem, but a profoundly spiritual crisis. The exploitation of creation reflects a rupture in the relationship between humanity and Creation, as well as between human beings themselves. Caritas recognises in these wounds the “cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth” evoked by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, and forcefully echoed by Pope Leo XIV.

Was this new document presented to Pope Leo XIV and endorsed by him?

Although this new *Framework for Action* has not been formally presented or promulgated by Pope Leo XIV, it is closely in line with the Holy Father's initial interventions, in which he urged the Church to go beyond mere condemnation to develop pastoral and structural responses capable of protecting both people and the planet.

Who is this text intended for? How do you hope that episcopal conferences or dioceses in different parts of the world will take ownership of this framework in a concrete way?

The *Framework for Action* is addressed to bishops and episcopal conferences, diocesan Caritas organisations and social pastoral services, religious congregations, Catholic universities and lay movements. But its real audience is even broader: it is aimed at all those in the Church who wish to accompany communities affected by the consequences of abusive mining and who are seeking concrete ways to implement the social doctrine of the Church. It is also a useful tool for promoting respectful and responsible exploitation of resources among decision-makers and mining companies.

This document is not intended to be a finished product, but rather a living instrument of discernment. It invites each local Church to interpret its principles according to its own context, developing local action plans, forming resource teams, and establishing partnerships with universities and civil society. Some dioceses have already embarked on this path. In Colombia, for

example, several diocesan Caritas organisations have created ecological ministries that monitor mining projects and offer legal and pastoral support to the families concerned. In the Philippines, the bishops' *Eco-Convergence* network has fostered strong collaboration between ecclesial institutions, academics and indigenous communities to promote sustainable alternatives to destructive exploitation.

The document states that it is rooted in the "See - Judge - Act" method. How does this translate into concrete action?

"See" means getting close to people: listening, gathering facts, understanding the reality of the impact of mining through the eyes of those who experience it every day. "Judge" means discerning these realities in the light of the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church, seeking the assistance of the Spirit through principles such as human dignity, solidarity, the universal destination of goods, and the need for conversion and reconciliation of all those involved in the process — a particularly demanding challenge. Finally, "acting" consists in responding with concrete initiatives that restore justice and promote integral human development.

This process is already evident in several local experiences around the world. In the Philippines, in the diocese of Butuan, for example, pastoral teams live alongside families affected by open-pit mining, helping them to document environmental damage and engage in non-violent advocacy. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Caritas teams have trained local leaders to carry out independent environmental assessments and present their findings to regional authorities and church bodies.

The document refers to significant power imbalances between mining companies and local communities. How can the Church exert real influence without having the same financial or political resources, and without being accused of interference or of being exploited?

The power imbalance between multinationals and local communities is immense and is one of the main causes of injustice in the mining sector. Caritas does not seek to match the power of companies, but to transform the relationship through solidarity, information and moral authority, doing everything possible to ensure that those affected are heard by political authorities and mining companies themselves.

The Church's influence does not lie in wealth, but in its ability to accompany, to bring people together and speak the truth. And when it comes to speaking the truth, a fundamental principle of the Church's social doctrine is respect for the human dignity of all. This means doing everything possible to achieving the common good, without giving in to the logic that it is acceptable to sacrifice the well-being of a few for the benefit of the many.

That is why Caritas strengthens communities by forging alliances — connecting local voices to national and international networks. We support education on legal rights, environmental monitoring and communication, in order to help communities defend their rights themselves with knowledge and confidence. The Church also uses its global network to connect local testimonies to international advocacy, ensuring that abuses do not remain hidden.

This advocacy work is an exercise in moral responsibility. The Church does not impose solutions; it amplifies the voices of the poor and defends their right to participate fully in decisions that affect their lives, striving to build bridges between the parties involved.

The concept of the "free, prior and informed consent" of local populations is central. How can the Church help to ensure that this right is truly respected?

The right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is at the heart of this work. The document emphasises that this consent must be genuine — not a formality obtained under pressure or through misinformation. Communities must have access to clear information, independent and understandable; they must be free to deliberate according to their traditions and values; and their decisions must be respected, even when they choose to say no.

The Church can contribute to making this right effective in several ways. Caritas often helps communities translate technical impact assessments, facilitates access to legal assistance, and funds independent studies when company reports are biased or incomplete. Parishes can offer safe spaces for dialogue and discernment, where communities can express themselves without fear. And when land defenders are threatened or attacked, the Church gives them visibility and protection through its networks, thereby increasing the moral cost of intimidation and targeted violence.

Ultimately, ensuring genuine consent is a matter of defending human dignity. It is affirming that people and ecosystems demand full and profound respect, and that they are not mere commodities intended to maximise shareholder profits.

The document concludes with a tribute to activists who were murdered for dedicating their lives to defending the earth, particularly in Latin America. You raise the question of recognising a new "ecological martyrdom". Is the Church ready to embrace this language?

The question of whether to formalise a category of "ecological martyrdom" is posed as a profound and urgent theological question; the publication highlights the need for recognition, remembrance and concrete protective measures to save the lives of the new generation of environmental activists. It also calls for a fight against impunity and corruption at different levels of government, which often collude with private interests.

Translated from the French by the Laudato Si' Research Institute. Original is available at <https://www.humandevlopment.va/fr/news/2025/webinar-di-presentazione-del-documento-catholic-approaches-to-mi.html>