



## *Committee on International Justice and Peace*

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March 17, 2015

The Most Reverend Carlos Aguiar Retes  
Archbishop of Tlalnepantla  
President  
Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano  
Carrera 5 N° 118 – 31  
Bogotá D.C., Colombia

Your Excellency:

I write as Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace (the “Committee”) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to express our solidarity with and support for the Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM) in its petition for a hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) on the human rights implications of extractive industries in that region. This hearing is scheduled for March 19, 2015.

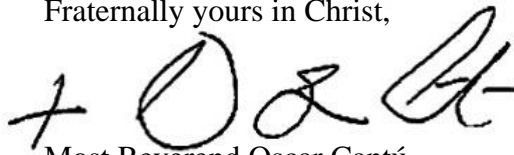
The USCCB, through the work of the Committee, has long been concerned about the implications of extractives and mining operations throughout the world, especially in Latin America. My predecessor as Chair of the Committee, Bishop Richard E. Pates of the Diocese of Des Moines, travelled to Colombia and Peru in 2013, and to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras last year. During his solidarity visits, Bishop Pates had the benefit of meeting with representatives of the Bishops’ Conferences as well as with officials at the U.S. embassies and USAID missions in these nations. As a result, our Committee is aware of the role that the extractives industry plays in the economies of this region, and the often calamitous public health and environmental consequences of poorly regulated mining operations by U.S. and Canadian multinationals.

We cannot separate the consequences of migration from the fundamental “root causes” existing in these countries. In this regard, key policies facilitated by our trade agreements, as well as the resultant conduct of U.S. and Canadian mining companies in these countries, have too often contributed to destructive environmental and public health consequences for communities throughout Latin America. As Bishop Pates noted in his letter to Secretary of State John Kerry of July 24, 2014, “[t]he conduct of U.S. and Canadian mining companies in these countries has contributed to destructive environmental and public health consequences for communities in Central America. We heard powerful testimonies, by civil and Church leaders, of brutality and oppression, including torture and murder. Community leaders and representatives of indigenous communities in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, who resisted the unregulated expansion of mining activities in their native lands, have been targeted. Our government, joined by our Canadian allies, must do more to support the claims and interests of these affected communities. It must require that U.S. enterprises operating in these regions abide by the same standards of care for human life and ecology as apply to their operations in the United States.” Similar testimonies of abuse exist throughout the region.

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For all these reasons, we believe that the humanitarian crisis affecting the region, including the United States, resulting in migration will not be resolved until critical economic policies that contribute to violence, including those related to the extractives and mining industry operating in this region, are addressed and rectified. We support CELAM's efforts to bring these matters to the attention of the global community, and express our solidarity with the Church in Latin America and its efforts, through the leadership of CELAM, in the hearing before the IACHR noted above and the related petition it has filed.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Oscar Cantú', written in a cursive style.

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú  
Bishop of Las Cruces  
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace