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Audience with the participants in the meeting on the mining industry organized by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

At 11.45 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the meeting organized by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on the theme of “Mining for the Common Good” (Vatican, 2 to 3 May 2019).

The following is the Pope’s address to those present during the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I extend my warm welcome to all of you and I thank Cardinal Turkson for his introduction. I thank you all for having come to the Vatican to engage in this dialogue on the theme of “Mining for the Common Good”.

In my Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, concerned about the worrying of the Planet, I underlined how important it is “to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (n. 3). We need a dialogue that responds effectively to the “cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor” (*ibid.*, 49). I am particularly appreciative that in your meeting, representatives of communities affected by mining activities and leaders of mining companies have come together around the same table. It is laudable; and it is an essential step on the way forward. We should encourage this dialogue to continue and become the norm, rather than the exception. I congratulate you for embarking on the path of mutual dialogue in the spirit of honesty, courage and fraternity.

The precarious condition of our common home has been the result largely of a fallacious economic model that has been followed for too long. It is a voracious model, profit-oriented, shortsighted, and based on the misconception of unlimited economic growth. Although we frequently see its disastrous impacts on the natural world and in the lives of people, we are still resistant to change. “Economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to [...] the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context

into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment” (*ibid.*, 56).

We are aware that “by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (*ibid.*, 109) and that “environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits” (*ibid.*, 190). We need a paradigm shift in all our economic activities, including mining.

In this context, the title for your meeting, “Mining for the Common Good” is very appropriate. What does it concretely imply? Please allow me to articulate a few reflections in this regard which could assist you in your dialogue.

First of all, mining, like all economic activities, should be at the service of the entire human community. As Pope Paul VI wrote: “God intended the Earth and everything in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. ... created goods should flow fairly to all”.^[1] It is an essential pillar of the Church’s social teaching. In this perspective, the involvement of local communities is important in every phase of mining projects. “A consensus should always be reached between the different stakeholders, who can offer a variety of approaches, solutions and alternatives. The local population should have a special place at the table; they are concerned about their own future and that of their children, and can consider goals transcending immediate economic interest.” (*Laudato Si’*, 183).

In the light of the upcoming Synod on the Amazon, I would like to stress that “it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed” (*ibid.*, 146). These vulnerable communities have a lot to teach us. “For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values ... Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for [...] mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture.” (*ibid.*). I urge everyone to respect the fundamental human rights and voice of the persons in these beautiful yet fragile communities.

Secondly, mining should be at the service of the human person and not vice versa. As Pope Benedict wrote: “In development programs, the principle of the centrality of the human person, as the subject primarily responsible for development, must be preserved.”^[2] Each and every person is precious before God’s eyes and his or her fundamental human rights are sacred and inalienable, irrespective of one’s social or economic status. Attention for the safety and wellbeing of the people involved in mining operations as well as the respect for fundamental human rights of the members of local communities and those who champion their causes are indeed non-negotiable principles. Mere corporate social responsibility is not sufficient. We need to ensure that mining activities lead to the integral human development of each and every person and of the entire community.

Thirdly, we need to encourage the implementation of a circular economy, all the more in the sphere of mining activities. I find the observation that my brother bishops of Latin America made in their recent pastoral letter regarding extractive activities very pertinent. They wrote: “By ‘extractivism’ we understand an unbridled tendency of the economic system to convert the goods of nature into capital. The action of ‘extracting’ the greatest amount of materials in the shortest possible time, converting them into raw materials and inputs that industry will use, that will then be transformed into products and services that others will market, society will consume and then nature itself will receive in the form of polluting waste - that is the consumerist loop that is being generated at ever greater speed and ever greater risk.”^[3]

We need to denounce and move away from this throwaway culture. “Our industrial system, at the end of its cycle of production and consumption, has not developed the capacity to absorb and reuse waste and by-products. We have not yet managed to adopt a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them.” (*Laudato Si’*, 22) The promotion of a circular economy and the “reduce, reuse, recycle” approach are also very much in consonance with the Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns promoted by the 12th Sustainable Development Goal of the

United Nations. Moreover, religious traditions have always presented temperance as a key component of responsible and ethical life style. Moderation is also vital to save our common home. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (*Mt* 5:5).

My dear brothers and sisters, our efforts and struggles to safeguard our common home are truly an ecumenical journey, challenging us to think and act as members of one common home (*oecumene*). I am particularly pleased that your meeting has brought together representatives of Churches and faith communities from around the world. I also thank the leaders of the mining industry for having joined this conversation. We need to act together to heal and rebuild our common home. All of us are called to “cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents” (LS 14).

It is my sincere hope that your meeting be truly a moment of discernment that may lead to concrete action. I pray, as my brother bishops from Latin America wrote, that you may “analyze, interpret and discern what are appropriate or inappropriate extractive activities in the territories; then, propose, plan, and act to transform our own way of life, to influence the mining and energy policies of states and governments, and in the policies and strategies of companies dedicated to extractivism, all for the purpose of achieving the common good and a genuine human development that is integral and sustainable.”[4]

Your meeting is so important as you are dealing with questions that concern the future of our common home and the future of our children and the future generations. “We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.” (LS 160) May you never lose sight of this larger picture!

With great affection, I bless you, your families and your communities. Please pray for me too. Thank you.

[1] Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 22.

[2] Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 47.

[3] CELAM, *Missionary Disciples: Custodians of Our Common Home*, 11.

[4] CELAM, *Missionary Disciples: Custodians of Our Common Home*, 12.
