



- ACP countries unite against unfair trade practices
- Call to WTO to suspend negotiations indefinitely
- The Amazon Synod and the extractive industries: lessons for Africa
- Digital colonialism: tech giants seek unregulated global power

## ACP<sup>1</sup> COUNTRIES UNITE AGAINST UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES

In December 2019, President Kenyatta of Kenya, assumed the presidency of the ACP group from the outgoing president Davis Steven, Deputy Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea. Addressing the Summit of ACP Heads of State in Nairobi, Kenyatta said: ‘As ACP states, we should be firm in advocating for a fair multilateral trading system that safeguards our economies from unfair trading practices’.

He identified four priority areas for the ACP group:

- manufacturing,
- affordable housing,
- universal health coverage and
- food and nutrition security.

Giving priority to these four areas will ‘drive equitable and inclusive economic development, improve quality of life, create jobs particularly for youth, and improve our countries’ resilience against the anticipated challenges posed by climate change’, Kenyatta said. Climate change presents a threat to the world but most particularly to small island nations that are 40% of the ACP countries .

‘The ACP group is the largest multi-national organisation in the world and should, therefore, play a stronger role in global affairs’, Kenyatta said,

Source: PACNEWS , [www.pina.com.fj](http://www.pina.com.fj)

## CALL TO WTO TO SUSPEND NEGOTIATIONS INDEFINITELY

Over 400 civil society organisations around the world have been urging the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to suspend **all** trade and investment treaty negotiations during the COVID-19 outbreak, rather than continue by digital communication in virtual meetings. It is not feasible for many developing and least developed countries to participate, given the digital divide. As well, all govern-

mental resources are being mobilised to focus on this public health emergency. These pressures are especially intense for developing countries.

The letter to the WTO calls on the organisation to ensure that all countries are free ‘to set aside trade rules that constrain their ability to resolve the pandemic crisis, without fear of repercussions, and to cease

---

<sup>1</sup> ACP stands for African, Caribbean and Pacific. The ACP group of countries comprises 48/54 African countries (not included are Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and South Sudan); the 15 members of the Caribbean Community together with the Dominican Republic; and 18 members of the Pacific Island Forum (excluding Australia and New Zealand) together with Timor Leste.

other negotiations and activities that divert their energy and resources from that goal’.

**It goes further to state that ‘the COVID-19 pandemic necessitates a fundamental re-think of rules negotiated in trade agreements’.** It notes particularly rules ‘that encourage monopolies, that reduce affordable access to all forms of medical supplies and that put at risk the lives of people in every country of the world’.

150 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also wrote specifically to Colombian Ambassador Santiago Wills, the chairperson of the WTO’s negotiations on fisheries. These talks are widely regarded as the only current multilateral negotiations with the chance of a meaningful outcome and were supposed to conclude at the end of this year, a deadline

set by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

After consulting participating members, Wills concluded that they were not prepared to engage in virtual discussions on binding decisions; and he announced in the first week of this month (May) that further work must be put on hold as they wait for pandemic-related restrictions to lift. Negotiators are now unlikely to meet their 2020 deadline.

Wills told members he would monitor the situation and touch base with them at a later date, although he did not specify when. He also urged members to keep engaging with each other in the meantime.

*Source: Hannah Monicken, 7 May 2020.*  
[www.insidetrade.com/daily-news](http://www.insidetrade.com/daily-news)

## THE AMAZON SYNOD AND THE EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES

### Lessons for the Church in Africa

Much of the commentary around the Amazon synod has focussed on its doctrinal pronouncements, especially about married priests and pantheism, but the Synod’s Final Document (FD) is an important contribution to Catholic social teaching. In particular, it made some powerful recommendations for a pastoral response to extractivism<sup>2</sup> as a model for development.

The Amazon Synod introduced the notion that **any economic model that seeks to attract direct foreign investment and spur economic growth should always adhere to ethical values, especially the care of God’s creation and respect for the human dignity of society’s most vulnerable members.** This is a deep

lesson that Africa and the Church on the continent should also embrace.

#### **The darker side of extractivism**

Extractivism is one of the most pressing moral issues of our time. Several countries in South America and Africa have adopted progressive extractivism as a model for development. It is a short-sighted strategy where countries build their direct foreign investment and economic growth on large-scale extraction and export of natural resources with little regard for human rights, care for the environment, and the long-term effects of unrestrained extractivism.

Corruption is the dark face of extractivism. Many resource-rich countries in the global south fail to gain maximum benefit from

---

<sup>2</sup> Extractivism is a term of growing use in Latin America. It describes economic activities that remove (extract) large amounts of a nation’s non-renewable natural resources (raw materials) to sell on the world market.

Extractive industries have increasingly formed the base of Latin American economies under neoliberalism. Examples are mining industries of all kinds, quarrying, crude oil and natural gas industries,

extractivism because of illegal money dealings and unfair trade agreements. The wealth created often remains in the hands of an elite minority (FD 72). Among the communities living in resource-rich areas the extractive industries have violated human rights and caused massive suffering among the poor.

The Synod denounced a ‘predatory extractivism which responds only to the logic of greed’ (FD 67). The Final Document lists adverse effects of the extractive economy, with a particular reference to the destruction of the Amazon forests (FD, 10-13). Other issues cited by the Synod echo those previously cited by the United Nations and other human rights organisations, such as land dispossession and the killing of anti-mining activists (FD 45-50, 69). All these destructive issues call the Church ‘to present Christ with all His power to liberate and humanise’ (FD 15).

#### **A Church that takes sides**

‘We may not be able to modify immediately the destructive model of extractivist development, but we do need to make clear where we stand, and whose side we are on’ (FD 70). The Synod has recommended several practical commitments through which the Church would manifest its solidarity with victims of extractivism.

They include:

- a divestment campaign against extractive industries (FD 70);
- a campaign for a global fund to settle the ecological debt owed to suffering communities (FD 83);
- establishing a monitoring system against human rights violations.

This challenge equally applies to African countries. Strategies to woo investors and realise economic recovery should not be considered immune from ethical scrutiny. The economic development of a country is not only about economic growth and economic efficiency. It is primarily about people, including future generations, and the care of God’s creation.

#### **Responsibility for ecological conversion**

The Synod also called for ecological conversion from the sin of consumerism. During one of their press conferences, some bishops pointed out that the industrialisation of the global north and its consumerist lifestyle are the key drivers of the expansion of extractive frontiers in South America and Africa. Ecological conversion is required from us all.

*Source: Rev. Stan Muyebe OP, Coordinator, Justice and Peace Commission, Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference*

## **DIGITAL COLONIALISM**

‘Tech giants’ join WTO negotiators to secure unregulated global power

‘Digital data in the 21st century is like oil in the 18th century: an immensely, untapped valuable asset. For those who see data’s fundamental value and learn to extract and use it, there will be huge rewards.’ (The Economist)

Global tech giants have been lobbying World Trade Organisation (WTO) officials at trade talks in Geneva to allow them to continue to operate without regulation.

Calls for regulation are increasing here in Australia (and in other countries) to address Facebook and Google’s data abuse scandals; anti-competitive practices by Facebook, Google and Amazon; Apple’s tax avoidance; Uber’s classifying of itself as a technological platform to avoid regulation and enable its exploitation of workers; and the human rights risks of facial recognition software.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) recommends more, not less, regulation of big tech companies to curb their abuse of market power and to protect consumers.

However, there are currently two sets of secret **e-commerce trade negotiations** that could determine the future regulation or deregulation of the digital domain.

### **E-commerce negotiations in Geneva**

The first is a plurilateral<sup>3</sup> agreement on e-commerce among 76 Members of the WTO - industrialised countries where the big tech companies have their largest presence. Civil society groups are excluded from these negotiations in Geneva but big tech giants Google, Facebook and others have had the opportunity to exert undue influence over the trade and regulatory agenda. Without access to the text of the agreement we can only infer from previous discussions on e-commerce what it might legislate. It could:

- support the free flow of data across borders;
- reject requirements for companies to have a local presence and so protect them from national privacy laws and tax regulations;
- include rules that prevent governments from accessing source code and algorithms, which are important tools in identifying and responding to anti-competitive practices and discrimination on the basis of race, gender, class or other categorisation.

### **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement (RCEP)**

The second set of negotiations are concerned with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement (RCEP), involving Australia and 14 other governments in the Indo-Pacific region. Of these 15 countries, 10 are members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), mostly developing countries that want time and opportunity to develop their own local digital industries and keep their freedom to regulate. They have majority bargaining power in negotiations with other countries that are wanting to export products into their expanding markets. The e-commerce chapter in the RCEP agreement has been leaked and shows a much more controlled approach to e-commerce rules. In the RCEP text, governments may require companies to have a local presence and require also that some data be held locally; they can access source code and algorithms and can protect consumer privacy; they can regulate the development of controversial applications like facial recognition technology.

An agreement in Geneva that upholds deregulation and further entrenches the power of global tech giants will close off the opportunities for regulatory reform in Australia - and in the other countries party to this e-commerce agreement.

*Source: Sophie Hardefeldt, 17 Feb, 2020, Trade Analyst and Campaigner, Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) [www.aftinet.org.au](http://www.aftinet.org.au)*

**Contributions to Bulletin and responses to its content are welcomed.  
Publication bi-monthly from office in Sydney. Deadline: 14<sup>th</sup> of each publication month.**

The Bulletin is currently produced by two networks: *Justice and Trade Agreements* and *Human Trafficking*.  
Coordinators: JTA - Mary Boyd ([maryboyd@live.ca](mailto:maryboyd@live.ca)); Alison Healey ([grailsydney@ozemail.com.au](mailto:grailsydney@ozemail.com.au));  
HT – Patricia Foito e Camisao ([pcamisao@gmail.com](mailto:pcamisao@gmail.com)); Angelina Kyondo ([mksgrail@yahoo.com](mailto:mksgrail@yahoo.com)).  
Design: Thanks to Marian Kelly for her donation of time and talent.

<sup>3</sup> On most matters, all WTO members subscribe to WTO agreements and these are called 'multilateral' agreements. However,

there are some agreements which have a narrower group of signatories and are known as 'plurilateral' agreements.