



**Global Justice
Overcoming Poverty**

Network BULLETIN

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FOR OUR COMMON HOME An action example

These days many of us are shocked by the statistics and stories from many countries as we continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, one of Canada's national collective actions, our Development and Peace organization, undertook a Solidarity action with the Amazon, focused on the theme, *For Our Common Home*. Our Diocesan Council, which I chair, engaged in an education and solidarity work with our partners in the Amazon. It was a *words to action* process, a very rewarding group action/reflection exercise that allows people to venture deeply into the lives and situations of others, especially when it comes to the task of poverty eradication.

The inspiration for the theme, *For Our Common Home*, came from the Synod on the Amazon. We were already aware that the Amazon is the world's largest tropical rainforest, spanning 9 countries – Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Columbia, Venezuela, Guyana, Surinam and French Guiana. We learned that there is no place on earth like the Amazon rainforest. It is home to: half of all the world's living plants and animals, one tenth of the world's known species, one fifth of the planet's fresh water, one third of the earth's forests, 30 million people, 380 indigenous groups and 140 groups living in voluntary isolation.

In the Amazon, indigenous, riverside and forest peoples lead sustainable lives, taking only what is needed to maintain their livelihoods. Their caring use of the land

ensures that the woodlands and waterways of this rainforest are preserved for future generations. Protecting the Amazon is a matter of survival not only for them but also for all of us, because we and all the Earth are interconnected. The Amazon is rightly described as the lungs of the earth, absorbing carbon emissions and providing 20% of the oxygen we breathe. It helps stabilize the climate of the Earth, our common home.

Unfortunately for the Amazonian people who try to live sustainable lives, the greedy of the earth want their resources to feed our growing consumer needs. The consequences are devastating for the people of the Amazon and all of humanity. Of special importance are lumber, oil, minerals, hydroelectricity and cattle ranches. Some scientists think that deforestation is already causing the Amazon to emit more carbon than it absorbs, further warming the planet instead of cooling it. Deforestation also compromises the forest's capacity to recharge groundwater reserves, increasing the risk of drought and hunger. Profit-driven exploitation also impoverishes indigenous peoples and violates their rights. Those who resist it and seek to defend their lands are harassed, persecuted, forcibly displaced and sometimes even killed. As its rightful residents suffer, the Amazon continues being stripped away.

In 2018, Pope Francis said, 'The native Amazonian peoples have probably never been so threatened on their own lands as they are now', This is because of new

highways and railroads that clear the forest and facilitate mass extraction of resources. Logging strips the land, which is then used for cattle ranching and industrial agriculture. Oil extraction and mining for gold and iron pollute the land, air and waterways and hydroelectric dams impede the river, causing unseasonable floods, devastating aquatic life and disrupting riverside communities. In the last 50 years, 17% of forest cover has been lost.

The defenders of the forest are extremely vulnerable. Our partners in the Amazon are the seringueiros (artisanal rubber tappers) of Machadinho d'Oeste, Rondonia State. The sixteen seringueiro reserves dedicated to hunting, fishing and gathering are under attack by powerful logging companies that are intimidating and evicting the people. In the last decades, their resistance has been brutally suppressed and 15 of them have been murdered.

The Mura people of Amazonia live sustainable lives, hunting, fishing and gathering, in 38 communities around Manaus, the capital of Brazil's Amazonian State. Their way of life is being threatened by a Canadian-financed potash mine. The people have won an interim injunction

against the mine on the grounds of inadequate consultation. Rede Eclesial Pan-Amazonica (REPAM), the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network, is helping the Mura with their litigation to safeguard their right to free, prior and informed consent. The Comissao Pastoral da Terra (CPT), the Pastoral Land Commission, is advocating the protection and empowering of the oppressed seringueiros as a matter of urgency.

One of our actions, besides sending funds, is to send the seringueiros and the Mura people a letter of solidarity with 65,000 signatures (one for each species of tree and vertebrate in the Amazon), to show our appreciation for their courage and to re-assure them that we are by their side in their struggles. These signatures will also help us to advocate in Canada and in Brazil for protection for the forest and its people. As well as these letters, children are invited to send drawings and 'selfies'; and other creative messages are welcome. We are also asked to commit to at least one change in our personal lives for the sake of our common home.

Source: Development and Peace, 'Our Common Home, A Future for the Amazon, a Future for All', www.devp.org. Summarised by Mary Boyd.

UN DECLARATION: RIGHTS OF PEASANTS AND RURAL WORKERS

The Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas was adopted by the United Nations (UN) at the end of 2018 by a large majority (121 votes in favour, 54 abstentions, 8 votes against). This Declaration is the result of nearly 20 years of mobilisation of La Via Campesina¹ and its allies, and 6 years of negotiation at the UN Human Rights Council.

80 % of the world's hungry people live in

¹ La Via Campesina, comprising 183 organisations in 81 countries, is a movement of millions of peasants, landless people, indigenous people and rural workers

rural areas. 75% of the one billion people living in extreme poverty in the world today live and work in rural areas. The global food crises of 2008 and 2009 and the corona virus that has been shaking the world since the end of 2019 have worsened the situation. Women account for as much as 70 % of the world's hungry people and the vast majority of these work in the agricultural sector.

Studies on human rights violations committed against rural populations show that

committed to defending peasant agriculture and food sovereignty as issues of social justice and human dignity.

existing human rights instruments are not sufficient to protect them and that certain particular conditions of peasants are not sufficiently taken into account. The UN Human Rights Council, therefore, decided a specific legal instrument to strengthen the rights of people living and working in rural areas was necessary.

Studies prior to the drafting of the Declaration identified five main causes of hunger that particularly affect peasants and others working in rural areas:

1. expropriation of land, forced evictions and displacement;
2. gender discrimination;
3. absence of agrarian reform and rural development policies;
4. repression and criminalisation of movements protecting the rights of people working in rural areas;
5. lack of a minimum wage and social protection.

The recent phenomenon of a global 'land-grab' has added another dimension, as governments and companies seek to buy and lease large tracts of productive land in other countries so that they can then export food back to their own countries, or grow biofuels to fill the petrol tanks of the global north. As well, supermarkets buy their products

primarily from large producers who are able to supply larger quantities. Because of their market power they often dictate discount prices; and these low prices in turn lead to poor wages and a lack of protection for farm workers.

The UN Declaration is a major step forward in the protection of the rights of peasants and other rural workers. It stipulates such rights as:

- the right to land;
- the right to seeds;
- the right to means of production such as water, credit and tools;
- the right to food sovereignty.

Most of these rights are new and do not appear in any other human rights instrument, eg, the right to land, seeds and means of production.

The Declaration obliges States to adopt all necessary measures to prevent private persons, such as landowners or transnational and national companies, from interfering with the realisation of these rights.

Source: Odile Ntakirutimana, Policy Officer Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN),, 4 Sept. 2020 . Edited Alison Healey.

AUSTRALIAN TRADE POLICY FAILING IN THE PACIFIC

Australian government ministers have initiated four separate Parliamentary Inquiries into Australia's diplomatic, defence and trade relationships with the Pacific Islands. This shows that the government is worried by the deterioration in its relationships with the Pacific, which is symbolised by the fact that Fiji and Papua New Guinea (PNG) have not signed the

PACER Plus² trade agreement with Australia and New Zealand since it was completed in 2017.

Fiji and PNG make up over 80% of Pacific island production. They are firmly refusing to sign PACER Plus because they say the deal is lopsided and does not meet their development needs. They already have

² The Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) entered into force in October 2002 and provided a framework for further trade negotiations in the future..

PACER Plus is the result of 9 years of negotiations (2009 – 17) developing PACER into a comprehensive trade agreement compatible with World Trade Organisation rules.

tariff-free access to Australia. PACER Plus mainly advantages Australia and New Zealand by reducing Pacific island tariffs on imports and easing controls on foreign investment.

During the nine years of negotiations on the agreement, Pacific island governments have said consistently that their priority is addressing the climate change crisis, not trade agreements. The Australian government has failed to address climate change in a way that is meaningful for the Pacific, which has damaged the relationship. This has created the context for China and others to compete for influence, which now appears to be the Australian government's main concern.

In 2018 an unusually critical Parliamentary Committee Inquiry Report with a majority of Australian government members noted the absence of any independent study of the economic impacts of PACER Plus.

Most Pacific Islands are still local farming and fishing economies, with dispersed populations and high transport costs; and they are dependent on import tariffs, which make up 10 - 20 % of government revenue. The World Bank has noted that such economies have difficulty developing new industries and employment to offset the

impacts of increased competition from imports. The Parliamentary Report warned also that the loss of government revenue from tariffs could lead to cuts to essential government services such as health and education.

Another serious defect in the agreement noted in the Parliamentary Report was that development assistance funds for implementation of the agreement were not additional funds but would come from the existing aid budget. It was not clear to the Committee how this would provide an increased benefit to Pacific Island countries. The Report recommended that some of these funds be used to monitor the potentially negative impacts on revenue, public health and gender equity.

But the Australian government has not so far acknowledged these flaws in the deal. For more than three years since the agreement was finalised and awaiting signatures, Australia's Trade Minister has been pressuring Pacific Island governments to ratify PACER Plus. (The agreement will become operative when a minimum of eight countries ratify it.)

Source: Dr Pat Ranald, Australian Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET), 5 March 2020.

If the solutions for the pandemic bear the imprint of selfishness, whether it be by people, businesses or nations, we may perhaps emerge from the coronavirus crisis, but certainly not from the human and social crisis that the virus has revealed and accentuated.

Pope Francis, *Healing the world*

Contributions to Bulletin and responses to its content are welcomed.

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The Bulletin is currently produced by two networks: *Justice and Trade Agreements* and *Human Trafficking*.

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