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OPEN LETTER

To the Minister of Mines and Strategic Resources

Copie to
The Prime Minister
The President of the Republic of Madagascar

OBJECT: For an equitable sharing of the mineral wealth of each territory in view of a stable and lasting development.

I am not a specialist but a poor pastor, who wants to serve the people and strongly wishes that they might live fully their humanity. A man of the land, who traverses places where even a car cannot pass, I allow myself to write you these few lines. They are a cry of distress before the “end” of my beloved people: a cry from the land, a cry from the poor, that the Pope highlights in his last encyclical, *Laudato Si'*: “*These situations have caused sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course*” (n. 53). In particular, the Pope calls all the baptized to it: A Christian who does not protect creation, who does not make it grow, is a Christian who does not give importance to God’s work, this work born of God’s love for us (cf n. 64 and n. 217).

To start with, I would like to make a precision in order to remove any ambiguity and avoid any polemic. It is in my own name, as a Christian and a justice and ecology-loving citizen, that I write this letter. I take complete responsibility for it, because what the Pope highlights in *Laudato Si'* strongly challenges me: “*Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*” (n. 49).

Madagascar, one of the planet’s poorest countries, has become a new Eldorado of the large international mining companies, always seeking new resources in order to satisfy the growing needs of the contemporary world. The Malagasy subsoil abounds in mineral resources: precious stones for ornamentation, gems and industrial minerals, chromite, mica, graphite, zircon, limonite, nickel, cobalt, iron, titanium, uranium, copper, gold, coal, limestone, gypsum, iron quartz and piezoelectric, etc. The diamonds in certain regions, the oil and gas in the canal of Mozambique and the rare earths in our region of Anpasimanjava are more recently known, without forgetting the old gold deposit of Betsiaka near Ambilombe. One also speaks a lot, at least through the media, of the mining code and the oil code. It was even announced that they will be voted on and promulgated very soon.

Thus my question: Is it not possible to have the native Malagasy of each region profit from all this wealth, equitably with the foreign powers?

Before the start of the preceding school year, in July 2014, as President of the Episcopal Commission for Teaching and Catholic Education, I wrote a letter to help the parents of students and especially the students of Catholic primary, middle, and secondary schools, centers, institutes, universities, etc.: "*Harena ny harena raha mamokatra ary mamokatra ho an'ny be sy ny maro*" (wealth is only wealth if it productive for everyone, for the common good). Some international associations like Voarabe for Madagascar, Mosaic Madagascar, etc. responded to our call. They presented me with their programs, which have as a goal to "make the Malagasy proprietors, direct participants in the mining activities of their territory, being able, thus, to profit from its riches." There is also the Taratra project of the Episcopal Conference's Social Commission, which works closely with the CEEEC for the education of citizens and the Episcopal Justice and Peace Commission.

The objective is to make the economic activity produced by the extractive sector compatible with the equitable redistribution of wealth among the exploiting companies, territories, cultivations, populations, and future generations. Has the moment not come to join hands in order to have all the Malagasy profit equitably from their resources, all the while sharing them equitably with the international investors? That requires a change of mentality and behavior in order to preserve their fruits and to have everyone benefit from them. That is why education holds an important place in this process, so that no future generation be "victim" or discarded.

Ny olona no harena lehibe indrindra (man is the riches of riches). In *Redemptor Hominis*, Pope Saint John Paul II emphasizes that man is the first way of the Church. He is the way of all authentic development. Madagascar is not lacking patriotic men and women, ready to make this beautiful island, blessed by God, progress. These are the three Ts of which the President often reminds us: *Tena Tia Tanindrazana* (speech at Ivato), but which must be concretized in the daily life of the people. Therefore, I invite you, who are presently in positions of responsibility, to consider and to support all those actions, which lead Madagascar's mining sector in the direction of social development and solidarity. I remind the international enterprises that there are procedures, which allow all those concerned by this wealth to profit equitably: that is what we wish for our country.

I conclude by imploring the blessing of God on you, those responsible for our nation, and on your families. May the Blessed Virgin, our first Patron, and Saint Vincent de Paul intercede for us so that the people may live in peace and that development for the good of all may move forward. On this land, blessed by God, we are united as a single family, *OLO ARAIKY SIKA JIABY*, "a common house," as the Pope emphasizes in his Encyclical.

Please accept, Mr. Minister, all my respects in Christ and I count on your understanding and your concern to work effectively for the integral development of our country's population.

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