



AMERICA/ARGENTINA - Bishops deplore the repression of peaceful protest and demand guarantees concerning the mining activity

Patagonia-Comahue (Agenzia Fides) - The Bishops of Argentina's Patagonia region-Comahue have criticized the mining operation in progress and called for respect for the international and national law for this activity, besides "deploring" the repression that occurred in the area "La Alumbreira" Catamarca. "We deplore what is happening in different regions of the country, where peaceful protest is repressed and divides society, while mining remains unpunished or is put into question in a superficial way," said the Bishops' statement.

The debate on mining has become a problem since the beginning of January, when roadblocks and demonstrations in the north-west of the country started against the exploitation of mineral deposits in the Famatina area (Rioja), Bajo La Alumbreira and Agua Rica (Catamarca). The most affected were the residents of Tinogasta, who had stopped the trucks carrying supplies for La Alumbreira: this sparked a real police repression that left eight wounded by rubber bullets, according to press reports.

On the occasion of the VIII Meeting of the several Commissions of the Pastoral care in the Region of Patagonia-Comahue, whose central theme was the Church and care for nature, all participants signed the request for dialogue with the authorities. "We want to share our position concerning the environmental impact of mines, which raises serious concerns in much of the Argentine people," says the letter sent to Fides.

The Church proposes an open dialogue and limitations on controversial issues, as well as an effort to ensure that cities and areas close to mining projects can maintain, their own lifestyle, their work, their production systems, their water, their hills, their forest. What is also requested is to express the political will for effective social control of these agreements and the rule of law in Argentina and the international law that protects the rights of indigenous peoples and territories.

This document is signed by the various Commissions of the diocesan pastoral and by the Bishops of the Diocese of Alto Valle of Rio Negro, Comodoro Rivadavia, Neuquén, Rio Gallegos, San Carlos de Bariloche and Viedma, and the Prelature of Esquel. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 23/2/2012)