

“Right to say no to mining”

The Right to Say No is an inalienable right etched onto our skins as humans and, over the decade, various communities have tried to assert this right on their own contexts and networks. This principle has been applied to various struggles but relatively recently activists have focused it on the devastating impacts of corporate mining, which violates human rights and the rights of nature, impoverishing communities with the extraction of minerals and further natural resources. A number of faith based organisations, in particular Churches and Mining working with various other churches, popular movements and NGOs arranged a groundbreaking meeting in 2015 when Latin American Churches met with the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace in Rome. This meeting highlighted the crisis in the extractivism sector and the asymmetries of power between transnational corporations (particularly mining corporations) and mining impacted communities.

Community resistance accompanied by the moral support from the progressive church and those working within the World Social Forum encouraged various groups to meet in the Thematic Social Forum that was held in 2018 in Johannesburg. It set out to build a common global political platform and movement against what they argued was the “current form of highly destructive extractivism.”

Since, many groups have tried to link their struggles to ensuring that corporate power be tamed and, where possible, reversed, scoring significant victories supported by continental and international solidarity. The Amadiba Crisis Committee (ACC) is one such group with their historic victory in the higher courts of law in South Africa that affirmed the right to say NO!

The Southern African Campaign to Dismantle Corporate Power and its other regional counterparts and global umbrella body, the Global Campaign and the Treaty Alliance, are leading members of the fight to push back corporate rule and they have recognised the importance of FPIC (Free, Prior and Informed Consent) principle as an all important condition in a binding treaty on transnational corporations. Thus the struggle to affirm our right to say NO demands that we work with other social justice campaigns if we are to be successful..

Over the last two years, and despite the impacts of the Covid19 pandemic on people and their movements and organisations, we have continued to find ways of learning from each other. Many have hosted online teach-ins, conferences and webinars and, where possible, meetings with communities to continue the struggle. What we have learnt is that resistance to injustice and corporate rule is inevitable if the right to say No and justice for all, is to be realised. It is not an easy or linear process but requires creative thinking, solidarity and continued organising and movement building.

Some of the questions we must explore include:

- how do we ensure the right is respected in law and on the ground?
- what links amongst mining communities and unions are desirable to ensure that we remain united, democratic and strong in the face of shrewd, unethical corporations?
- what are the strengths and limitations of the litigation strategy? Is it a sufficient weapon of or for the poor to use? Can a legal strategy be supplemented by global and country specific solidarity actions? If so, how do we connect these different struggles in defense of the land and peoples’ right to nature?
- how do we ensure that the affected people remain at the centre of their own resistance and their struggles are not replaced by experts or outside (well meaning) professionals?

- finally, what alternatives to the growth-greed model that extractivism development model underwrites do we advocate and organise around?

We explore these questions and others with you ably assisted by speakers from different networks working on the African continent and beyond.

Speakers:

Mercia Andrews (Peoples Dialogue) (invited)

Wilmien Wicomb (LRC)

David Van Wyk (Bench Marks Foundation)

Nonhle Mbathuma (Amadiba Crisis Committee)

Moderator Hassen Lorgat