

**One-page summary of key recommendations and messages of UNOC 2022 virtual side event, “The Sea is Sacred: Religious Responses to Deep Seabed Mining”, 29 June 2022.**

Event sponsors: NGO Mining Working Group, Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, VIVAT International, Pacific Conference of Churches.

Recording available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFiDi2CjF4s>

**Summary:**

This side event gathered representatives from Christian organizations to highlight the moral peril that oceans and coastal communities face from deep sea mining and other harmful extractive practices. There is so much about the deep sea that scientists do not yet know. The International Seabed Authority has already issued licenses for exploration and potential mining for more than 1 million square kilometers of the ocean floor. But the intensity of such activities could remove entire habitats and wipe out species have not yet been discovered. We, as humankind, have not comprehended the expanse of the ocean. Instead of being in glory of what lies on the sea floor, the response from industries has been to extract anything they can take of value. They blindly extract without even knowing the life that lives in those habitats.

Unfortunately, there are some arguments that state that minerals extracted through deep sea mining play a critical role in the renewable energy revolution to combat the climate crisis. But if it this at the expense of nature, there is surely an alternative method that can be used. The sea floor is a sacred space. It is an important part of creation. Deep seabed mining is a desecration of God’s creation. It is our moral duty and our common responsibility to protect the oceans.

There are also human rights implications to deep sea mining, particularly for small island and coastal people. We heard first-hand accounts from individuals who have seen the detrimental effects of extraction, which are guaranteed to worsen with deep-sea mining. In Ba, Fiji, the seabed has been turned upside down. “The sea has lost its blueness,” panelist Tevita Naikasowalu shared with regard to an area of Fiji impacted by land-based mining, whose impacts we understand more clearly already. He reported that the water is muddy and murky, which is a direct result of the waste that is discarded back into the sea. The consequences are visible. For fishing communities, their daily sustenance and incomes have been greatly reduced by extractive practices and sea level rise, and deep sea mining will exacerbate these issues in life-threatening ways.

For peoples of the Pacific islands, the ocean is part of their heritage, culture, history, identity, and life itself. The survival and wellbeing of future generations is central to their view of the world. Historically, these are the people who have stood up against nuclear testing, drift net fishing, bottom trawling, and marine pollution. As the successors to our ancestors who respected nature, we all have a longstanding legacy to uphold.

It is critical for nations around the world to recognize the sacredness of the ocean and the urgent need for the conservation, protection, and sustainable use by IPLCs of oceanic biodiversity. Speakers called on member states to:

- Ban deep sea mining
- Stop issuing exploration and exploitation permits
- Commit to source critical materials through sustainable practices
- Strengthen ocean-based action under the UNFCCC multilateral process
- Involve Indigenous and local communities in response action.
- Center Indigenous peoples’ knowledges and symbolic languages about how to approach ocean conservation throughout UN proceedings.