

THE LEUVEN LETTER

Responsible mining is the lie you don't get to sell tonight

„We should enable an honest and inclusive dialogue that centres on the true cost and impacts of growth-based consumption and mining.“

Dear panellists, dear audience,

The empty seats of this event have been taken by those who are directly affected by mining projects in Europe and all around the World. Unfortunately, we who when useful to you are considered an object but not a partner in a dialogue, are not able to make our points personally, nor do we support this type of event, linking the discussion of serious extractivist issues with a festive beer reception. Nevertheless, we want to mark our presence by the empty seats and with this letter. Each empty seat is a sign of our protest and refusal.

The undersigned civic society groups and indigenous communities affected by mining of raw materials express their deep concern about the aggressive and disrespectful forms of greenwashing via promoting a concept labelled *responsible* mining and respective certification schemes that are used to justify and legitimise exploitative and (neo-)colonial economic practices in the Global South and the European arctics and semi-peripheries. Responsible mining is nothing other than just another cosmetic fix to hide and shroud the true and destructive face of mining.

Lack of journalistic and scientific standards

The industrial storytelling documentaries *“Europe’s mining renaissance”* and *“Made in Europe: from mine to electric vehicle”* do not meet journalistic and scientific standards and therefore can not be considered professional in terms of documentary filmmaking:

1. Centred on a pro-industrial dialogue and featuring particular representatives of the auto-motive value chain that share the same development premises, both films fail to account for a well-balanced illustration of the complex perspectives on the Global and European geopolitics of mining and its real environmental and societal impacts. E.g. in *“Made in Europe”* only 10%- 5 of 50 minutes- are dealing with societal and indigenous positions, while dedicating the remaining time to industrial representatives, their lobby organisations, and favourable policy makers.
2. By cherry-picking a few representatives from the mining and metallurgy sector, omitting their wrongdoings, and overstating

technological solutions, the films are hawking a distorted and sugar coated representation of mining in the 21st century. In this respect, the pieces omit the toxic waste dumping and human rights abuses of Swedish mining company Boliden in Chile and its continuous failure to bear responsibility for the 1998 Doñana disaster in Spain. They omit that residents in Kiruna wake up at night by the LKAB mines’ explosions and that the open pit development of the Per Geijermalmen iron and rare earth deposit would lead to the collapse of the century old Gabna Sámi reindeer herding community. They omit the 2000 Baia Mare cyanide spill in Romania and the 2012 toxic leaks of the Talvivaara nickel mine in Finland. They omit the 2023 corruption investigations around lithium mining by the public prosecutor in Portugal and the related common land usurpation of Savannah Resources in the FAO recognized Barroso region. In general, they shun the dozens of recent mining disasters in Europe since the 2000s and also the (co-)responsibility of European companies for those in the Global South.

3. By employing populist and dramatic rhetoric instead of merely analysing resource dependencies, the films and their presenter Mr Jones, are propagating anti-Chinese sentiment and also disregarding the geopolitical complexity of European corporate actors being responsible for human rights abuses both in Europe and abroad. To cite Mr Jones: *“The tsunami of Chinese electric vehicles is coming and Europe is sleepwalking into an abyss.”*

With misinterpreted evidence whose presentation does not abide by ethical journalistic standards, standards otherwise praised by your rector and the industrial community, you are harming science and directly contributing to the growing and worrisome societal trends of scepticisms and extremisms that refuse factual evidence.

Lack of transparency on strategies to influence public opinion

We consider the films part of a wider strategy to influence public opinion on mining in Europe. As stated on the website of the publicly funded project EXCEED, sub-funding *“Europe’s Mining Renaissance”*, it aims to *“develop a framework [...] to achieve a SLO [Social License to Operate], thereby improving the public awareness, acceptance and trust in [...] mining and [...]”*

metallurgical processing in Europe", while the project ENICON sets out to "overcome the NIMBY syndrome". Associating land use conflicts around extractive activities with a selfish *Not in My Backyard* (NIMBY) attitude of local populations or denouncing them as "hypocrites" is usually a sign of an *argumentum ad hominem* and thus premature analysis, lack of data, and lack of consideration of often well justified positions against further extractivist land and biodiversity destruction.

While intending to influence public opinion, the projects EXCEED, LITHOS, AVANTIS and CICERO are supported by the European Commission meaning that they are paid for with taxpayers money. While the EU Commission finances and supports the films made by Mr Jones and his team, it refuses to disclose documents with details of their public financing, claiming the project's strategies to contain commercially sensitive information to be considered confidential industrial property.

Lack of real and bold solutions

The main argument of the film is that European society has to accept vast sacrifice zones in their backyards and overseas, despite all technologies of mitigation and compensation. The film states

that "we need 42x Lithium, 21x Cobalt, 19x Nickel by 2040". Whose needs are at stake here? The material and energy footprint of the Global North continues twice above a sustainable and just limit, well over the global average and considerably higher than in the European sub-arctic Sápmi communities or in the semi-peripheries of Ireland, Portugal, Serbia, Romania or Spain. Your day-to-day Teslas and leisure air travel is out of reach for the vast majority of communities that often, believe it or not, still rely on agricultural self-subsistence. In a premature attribution of hypocrisy, the authors confuse privileged European lifestyles of unhealthy and unjust production and consumption habits with those of marginal rural and Indigenous communities affected by mining. While focussing on securing industry in the centres of the Global North, you are acting out of fear that a real transition might affect your privileged roles.

With our physical absence and through this letter we call for more complexity beyond the narrative of green and responsible mining, and thus beyond the false dichotomy of fossil versus renewables. If we want to maintain the core values of the European community, we should not fall for populist and manipulative propaganda that benefits a few, but finally enable an honest, serious, and inclusive dialogue that centres on the true cost and impacts of growth-based consumption and mining.

The Signatories, Wednesday 27th of March 2024

Alianza Mar Menor - AMARME SPAIN Pb Sn Ag Zn Fe
Asociación A Lama Vive SPAIN Li
Asociación Ama Cáceres SPAIN Li
Asociación Alarma na Terra de Montes SPAIN Li
Asociación Alconchel sin minas SPAIN Au Cu Fe
Asociación Ambiental Tralapena SPAIN Cu
Asociación Assembleia do Suído SPAIN Li
Asociación pola Defensa da Dorsal Sur Galega SPAIN Li
Asociación pola Defensa da Ría SPAIN Li
Asociatia Roşia Montană in Patrimoniul Mondial ROMANIA Au Cu
Associação Montalegre Com Vida PORTUGAL Li W
Associação Povo e Natureza de Barroso PORTUGAL Li W
Associação Unidos em Defesa de Covas do Barroso PORTUGAL Li
AZU - Associação Ambiente em Zonas Uraníferas PORTUGAL U
CAIM - Communities Against the Injustice of Mining IRELAND Au ...
Debt for Climate Serbia SERBIA
Ecologistas en Acción SPAIN
Extinction Rebellion Serbia SERBIA
Fundação Montescola SPAIN W Sn
Friends of the Earth SPAIN
Janne Hirvasvuopio (Member of the Sámi Parliament of Finland) FINLAND Ni Co Cu
Marš Sa Drine, Loznica SERBIA Li
MiningWatch Portugal PORTUGAL
MiningWatch Romania ROMANIA Au Cu
Movimento ContraMineração Beira Serra PORTUGAL Li U

Movimento Não às Minas - Montalegre PORTUGAL Li W
Movimento SOS Serra d'Arga PORTUGAL Li
Movimento SOS Terras do Cávado PORTUGAL Li
Plataforma Alcalaboza Viva SPAIN graphite
Plataforma Comarca de Olivenza sin Minas SPAIN Au Cu Fe
Plataforma Contra la Mina a Cielo Abierto en el Nordeste Segoviano SPAIN quartz
Plataforma de Afectados por la Minería en Teruel SPAIN Fe
Plataforma de afectados por las explotaciones mineras de Peña Zafra, Balonga y Quibas SPAIN marble
Plataforma comarcal contra os vertidos da mina San Finx SPAIN W
Plataforma de afectados por metales pesados de la Sierra Minera SPAIN Pb Sn Ag Zn Fe
Plataforma en Defensa da Ría de Muros e Noia - PLADEMAR SPAIN W Sn
Plataforma No a la mina de Cañaverál SPAIN Li
Plataforma No a la mina en la Sierra de Yemas SPAIN feldspar
Plataforma Oro No SPAIN Au
Plataforma Salvemos las Villuercas SPAIN Li Fe
Plataforma Sierra de Gata Viva SPAIN Li Sn W Zn
Plataforma Veciñal Mina Touro-O Pino Non SPAIN Cu
Salvemos Esparteros - Plataforma Ciudadana Sierra de Morón, SPAIN
Save Our Sperrins IRELAND Au Cu Ag
SOS Suído-Seixo SPAIN Li
Trai cu Rost, Rosia Montana ROMANIA Au Cu