

# The Evangelist

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## **ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN**

### **Archbishop emphasizes care for creation**

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Archbishop Pedro Barreto Jimeno of the Diocese of Huancayo, Peru, was discussing the state of the environment with another bishop recently and said, "Some technology permitting pollution can be changed to technology that doesn't pollute."

"How much will that cost?" his fellow bishop asked.

"Probably a billion dollars," the archbishop replied.

The other bishop laughed. "You'd have to wait a hundred years," he declared, to amass that kind of money.

#### **Poor wait**

Recalling the conversation as he addressed U.S. journalists and staff from Catholic Relief Services, the overseas aid agency of American Catholics, Archbishop Barreto shook his head in frustration.

"It's sad a brother bishop would say that, because he's really saying the poor have to wait and the capitalists who are investing [in Peru's mines] are getting the profits," he remarked.

Archbishop Barreto is a passionate advocate for Peru's poor, particularly in his diocese in the Mantaro River Valley, where some 20 different mines pull ore from the earth -- and pollute the air, water and soil to such a degree that one local mining town is ranked with Chernobyl on a list of the world's most polluted places.

#### **Seeking solution**

"If the valley is not cleaned up, it can completely die because of pollution," the archbishop stated. "What we're really trying to do [is] to get an efficient, effective, non-violent solution to the problem."

Catholic social teaching mandates both care for the environment and a preferential option for the poor, he added, but admitted that the situation of environmental cleanup and human rights in Peru is "explosive."

Through U.S. contacts, Archbishop Barreto arranged for St. Louis University researchers and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control to test the blood and urine of 200 residents of the mining town of La Oroya. That study, completed in 2005, showed daily exposure to what researchers called a "toxic cocktail" of cadmium, mercury, arsenic and other metals. Children were found to be at high risk of lead poisoning.

### **Key issue**

Creation "is our common house that God has given us," Archbishop Barreto told the visiting journalists. "There's an irrational exploitation of resources; it's more brutal [than it needs to be]."

He cited a document published by the Latin American bishops' conference that demands the Church "commit itself to the needs of those affected by the problem."

The archbishop, who along with other activists has gotten death threats for his opposition to mining in Peru, said the Church must continue to advocate to change policies that affect the environment, and that mining companies should adopt the higher environmental standards demanded in countries like the U.S.

### **Rights**

Archbishop Barreto also challenged the people of Peru to stand up for their own rights.

He remarked that the natives of part of his diocese have a reputation for being rebellious, so they need to use that trait and work toward reviving the Mantaro River Valley.

"The Church, being faithful to Catholic social teaching, just can't remain quiet -- and can't just denounce the problem. It has to look for alternatives," he stated.

**(Archbishop Barreto noted that, while the Jesuit-run St. Louis University conducted the 2005 scientific study that proved how bad pollution was in his diocese, he hopes**

**to get other American entities on-board to help, as well. "There are 23 Jesuit universities in the U.S.," he pointed out, smiling.)**

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