

SABBATH REST FOR ALL CREATION



In 1984, the Ok Tedi gold mine opened in Papua New Guinea (PNG), providing the government with much-needed foreign exchange for basic services such as health and education.

The company, Ok Tedi Mining Limited (OTML), said they would use normal methods of disposing of waste, such as a “stable waste rock dump” and a “tailings dam”. They ignored the fact that high rainfall and steep slopes meant that these would not work. They ignored scientific advice.

When these methods of waste disposal failed, they changed methods. With the approval of the government, the company discharged waste into the Fly River system – 80,000 tons per day. These mining wastes damaged the river system with silt and toxic waste. Fish and water plants died. Forests died. The river and the Sago forests were sources of food.

Now the balance between the local people and the environment has been destroyed. Some of the waste may spread as far as Australia and the Great Barrier Reef.

When the mine was being established, people near the mine were paid for their land. But when wastes were discharged into the river, the land and the people downstream were also affected. The harm continued all the way to the sea. These people were not consulted.

OTML first tried to repair the damage. This did not work. It provided some compensation for communities along the river, but this did not replace the environment or the peoples’ source of livelihood.

A large partner in OTML was BHP, an Australian company. The Australian government has given it a legal indemnity. This stops landowners from using the courts to get justice. BHP does not have to repair the damage it caused. Yet BHP says it is environmentally responsible.

The wellbeing of the environment is a local and

global issue. Here is a case where the global economy had a devastating effect on the local ecology, local communities and the local economy.

This story, in different forms, can be found in many parts of the Pacific. People must question trade and “development” that damages their environment and their communities.

Communities can band together to stop environmental destruction. In Australia, the Ok Tedi story has been publicly exposed by a community organization, the Mineral Policy Institute.

(Sources: BHP *BHP and Ok Tedi Discussion Paper August 1999*; BHP and Ok Tedi Mining Limited, *Video Restoring the Balance*; Mineral Policy Institute <http://www.mpi.org.au/>)

JUSTICE, REST AND RENEWAL FOR CREATION

Genesis 1 tells of God creating the earth, and its web of life, with great love and care, stage by stage. It is God’s design, God’s handiwork, God’s masterpiece. Every part has its place. Every creature is good.

God gives humankind the stewardship of the earth and all creatures. It is ours to live in, and we have power over it. God gives it to us that we might flourish. The question is: how do we use our power? Do we nurture the earth, as a garden, rejoicing in it as a gift? Or do we trample it down, like a violent king who grabs power for selfish ends?

On the seventh day, God rested. The sabbath, the day of rest, is both commandment and gift. It is one of the ten commandments (Ex 20). It is for all creatures: family, stranger and livestock. It is reflected in the jubilee year, when the fields are allowed to rest. God created us not merely for busyness, but also for rest.

In Isaiah 58, sabbath rest is about resting from our personal and business interests. It is about delighting in worship and action for justice. Sabbath rest is about being part of creation, instead of being



apart from it. When the psalmists rejoice with the hills, the trees, the fish of the oceans and the birds of the air, they are living this idea of sabbath rest (Ps 104).

In the great thanksgiving of the communion service, there is a traditional response in which minister and congregation join “with all creation” in praising God, saying “Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.” In this moment, the faith community is not merely the people who are present, but all creation. All creation enjoys the sabbath and rejoices in the Creator.

In a world where so much of God’s creation is being damaged and destroyed, God calls us to remember our unity with all living creatures, and to work for their protection.

QUESTIONS

1. WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE ENVIRONMENT IN YOUR AREA? HOW DO DAILY ACTIVITIES:

- CONTRIBUTE TO EROSION?
- CAUSE POLLUTION OF THE AIR, WATER SUPPLY OR OCEAN?
- CAUSE THE DESTRUCTION OF FORESTS NEAR WHERE YOU LIVE, OR IN ANOTHER NATION?
- CONTRIBUTE TO GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS?
- ENDANGER SPECIES OF BIRDS, FISH, ANIMALS OR PLANTS?
- CAUSE OTHER FORMS OF HARM?

2. WHAT DOES THE PROMISE OF SABBATH REST FOR ALL CREATION MEAN IN YOUR CONTEXT?

3. IMAGINE THE PROPHET WHO WROTE ISAIAH 58 LOOKING AT THE INJUSTICE TO THE ENVIRONMENT TODAY. WHAT WOULD HE SAY?

4. HOW CAN YOUR CHURCH RESPOND TO THE INJUSTICE BEING DONE TO CREATION?

PRAYER

*Gracious God,
We thank you for your immense love
and we delight in the wonder of your
world.*

*We want to join with all living things
in offering you our praise.*

But this is not easy.

*We hear the lament of extinct species,
whose blood cries from the ground,
and endangered species who need our
protection.*

*We hear the cries of mangroves,
forests and rivers that are dying,
and watch in horror as soil is
damaged and eroded.*

*We pray for governments and
corporations, for communities and for
our congregation, that all may know
your wisdom and care for the earth,
and stop greed from destroying the
web of life. Amen.*

AUTHOR

Ann Wansbrough is from Australia. She is a minister in the Uniting Church of Australia, with degrees in biologic science and divinity. She works for UnitingCare NSW.ACT, a social justice agency of the Uniting Church in Australia.

ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS IN THE PACIFIC

AUSTRALIA,
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

*Soil erosion
Soil salinity
Degradation of inland and
marine waters
Depletion of wetlands
Desertification*

*Depletion of fisheries
Loss of biodiversity*

PAPUA NEW GUINEA, SOLOMON
ISLANDS, NEW CALEDONIA,
VANUATU, FIJI

*Deforestation
Land degradation
Soil erosion*

*Loss of biodiversity
Water degradation*

*Limited access to potable water
Depletion of coastal fisheries*

Climate change

TONGA, SAMOA, AMERICAN SAMOA,
FRENCH POLYNESIA, PALAU,
GUAM, NORTHERN MARIANA
ISLANDS

*Deforestation
Soil erosion*

*Loss of biodiversity
Depletion of coastal fisheries*

*Degradation of inland and
marine waters*

COOK ISLANDS, KIRIBATI, TUVALU,
MICRONESIA, MARSHALL ISLANDS,

NIUE, NAURU

*Vulnerability to natural
disasters*

Climate change

Water degradation

*Limited access to potable water
Coastal erosion*

*Source: Adapted from United Nations
Economic and Social Commission State of
the Environment: Asia and the Pacific*