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**STRIP MINING  
A CALL FOR  
REGULATION**

**A Statement  
of the  
Committee on Social  
Development and  
World Peace**

**UNITED STATES  
CATHOLIC CONFERENCE**

**September 16, 1976**

*Strip mining*

## STRIP MINING

### A Call for Regulation

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of the  
Committee on Social Development and  
World Peace

1. During the last several years we have witnessed in the United States a substantial increase in the practice of strip mining to obtain coal and other minerals. This has been due primarily to the rising demand for the development of our domestic energy resources.

2. The issues involved in the development of a just U.S. energy policy are many and complex. Our intention here is not to treat all the aspects and ramifications of such a policy, but rather to deal with the strip mining of coal. We feel that this is a particularly pressing issue deserving of our immediate attention.

3. In order to meet the demand for coal, the federal government is encouraging a rapid escalation of strip mining in Appalachia and in the western states. In many areas this practice has been virtually unregulated, causing severe damage to the environment and great hardship to the people in the surrounding communities.

4. In the mountains of Appalachia, flooding and landslides caused by unstable high walls and lands left barren from strip mining, have destroyed homes, property and roads and have accounted for the loss of many lives in the region. The exploitation of the rich coal and mineral resources especially in central Appalachia, has resulted in chronic unemployment and poverty for the people who live in the strip mined areas. The Bishops of Appalachia, in 1975, expressed their deep concern for the "powerlessness" of the people within the region to have control over their own lives and lands.

5. In the western states, without strict regulation, this development poses threats similar to those experienced by the people of Appalachia. Farmers and ranchers are confronting increased pressures to sell their lands to strip mining com-

panies. Indian tribes, particularly those whose lands are held in trust by the federal government, have faced similar pressures. In addition, proposed strip mining operations and coal conversion plants will require vast amounts of water, a resource already scarce in many parts of the West.

6. The Church has a particular responsibility to address the moral questions involved in the issue of strip mining. Our Tradition teaches us that we are stewards of God's gifts of creation, not the least of which are our abundant energy resources. As responsible stewards we must take care to see that these gifts are distributed in ways that provide for the basic needs of all people and that the development of these resources does not infringe on the basic human rights of people nor mistreat the land from which they come.

7. The Catholic Committee of Appalachia, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, the Campaign for Human Development, as well as several dioceses and religious congregations, have worked diligently to apply Catholic social teaching to the complex problems associated with this issue and to serve the people and communities adversely affected by strip mining. We are greatly encouraged by their efforts and wish to join our voices with theirs in calling for a more just and responsible approach to the production and use of our coal and mineral resources.

8. Specifically, we feel that national regulatory legislation is urgently needed to promote the responsible development of our coal and mineral resources and to protect the people and lands affected by such production. Until such time as new national legislation is adopted, state laws should be strictly enforced. National legislation should at least:

- Prohibit strip mining of lands which cannot be returned to their original contour or productivity;
- Prohibit strip mining on prime agricultural lands;
- Protect the owner-operators of surface lands;
- Require and set strict guidelines for reclamation wherever strip mining is permitted;

- Provide for the reclamation of lands previously stripped and abandoned;
- Establish methods of determining priority uses for water and other resources needed for strip mining;
- Require public participation in determining whether individual sites should be strip mined;
- Require the coal industry to observe the laws of individual states regarding strip mining when these are stricter than federal law;
- Promote research and development of less damaging mining techniques;
- Preserve the option for individual states to enforce stricter mining and reclamation standards on non-federal lands than provided under federal law;
- Provide adequate funding of enforcement agencies to enable them to fully implement strict regulatory programs.

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