**CATHOLICS IN COALITION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE**

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Mr Chris Salisbury

CEO

Rio Tinto Level 7, 360 Collins Street Melbourne VIC 3000

June 3 2020

Dear Mr Salisbury

I represent Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace, an organisation dedicated to addressing issues of social justice. I write to express our shock and dismay at the destruction of two sacred sites of the local Puutu Kunti Kurrama people by Rio Tinto at Juukan Gorge WA last week. 46000 years of extraordinary history in our nation sacrificed for profit. They were not only extremely important sites for Aboriginal communities, but also they were extremely important sites for archaeological understanding of the distant past in Australia and for all Australians to respect and acknowledge the privilege of having in our nation the oldest continuing culture on the planet.

Rio Tinto has apologised but failed to provide a clear explanation of why it ignored the concerns being expressed by representatives of the PPKKP some days before the blast. This raises more questions about the commitment of Rio Tinto and the WA and Federal Governments to protecting significant and unique Indigenous sites in the country. The failure to respect such an important site at Juukan Gorge and be transparent about your mining processes will require more than an apology after the fact.

Prime Minister Morrison said recently that Australia does not have the problems we are witnessing in the riots in the US. However we are not immune to such tensions especially knowing of the 432 Aboriginal deaths in custody since the 1991 Royal Commission on that issue. There is a serious divide between black and white Australia although less visible because Indigenous peoples make up a smaller share of our population.

Greg McIntyre SC, a leading expert on Aboriginal heritage cases stated recently “Under the current legislation, the only legal option for traditional owners who oppose a decision allowing the destruction of their heritage lies in administrative law, an argument that due process has not been followed. That does not in itself halt a development, but it does cause delays. The best legislation I think we’re likely to get is legislation that has a heavy emphasis on involving Aboriginal people in the decision making, but with the understanding that ultimately they will be expected at best to go into partnership with those that wish to extract minerals rather than prevent that from happening,”

CCJP asks that in any future negotiations Rio Tinto places equal value on Aboriginal cultural, spiritual and historic understandings as it does on its profit–making. You will then be seen to be truly committed to Aboriginal rights and heritage.

Yours sincerely

Anne Lane

Anne Lane pbvm

Convenor

Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace