



Climate Colonialism

Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson
General Minister and President

At the end of July, I received correspondence from the General Secretary of the Congregational Christian Church of America Samoa (CCCAS). In his missive, the General Secretary wrote to inform me about the Resolution on Deep Sea Mining and the Protection of God's Creation that the CCCAS adopted on July 24, 2026. He requested that the United Church of Christ "walk with us in this urgent work."

The General Secretary wrote: "As a Pacific church whose identity is inseparably tied to the ocean, we heard with deep concern about the growing threat posed by proposed and ongoing seabed mining activities in our region. The resolution recognizes that such activities may bring 'irreversible harm to marine biodiversity, fisheries, and the health of ocean systems,' with profound consequences for Indigenous communities whose cultures, livelihoods, and spiritual heritage are rooted in the moana."

Deep-sea mining is the process of collecting mineral resources from the ocean floor, usually more than 1,000 meters below the surface. The seabed is rich in resources like manganese, nickel, cobalt, copper, and rare earth elements. Mining the seabed and extracting its resources are a form of climate colonialism or resource colonialism. Climate colonialism refers to the exploitation of resources and power by Global North countries when dealing with climate change and environmental policies.

As American Samoans and other residents of the Pacific Ocean experience the adverse effects of the climate crisis and the exploitation of resources by the Global North, these realities of neocolonialism are amplifying the on-going presence of colonialism in the region. American Samoa is an unincorporated territory of the United States.

An unincorporated territory of the United States is an insular area under US sovereignty where the US Congress has determined that only selected parts of the US Constitution apply. These areas are not considered integral parts of the United States proper. Puerto Rico, Guam, and the US Virgin Islands are also unincorporated territories. American Samoa became an unincorporated territory in 1900.

The challenges raised and call to action issued by CCCAS regarding deep-sea mining are a response to Executive Order 14285, Unleashing America's Offshore Critical Minerals and Resources which was signed by the President of the United States on April 24, 2025. As communities are becoming more aware of the Executive Order just over a year after its signing, the alarm is being raised about the order's threat to the ecology, economy, and communal well-being of Pacific Islanders.

By exerting the right of the United States to take resources off shore, the order is steeped in colonial practices that wield authority over a region and a people with little to no concern for their welfare and well-being. The order states: "Our Nation must take immediate action to accelerate the responsible development of seabed mineral resources, quantify the Nation's endowment of seabed minerals, reinvigorate American leadership in associated extraction and processing technologies, and ensure secure supply chains for our defense, infrastructure, and energy sectors."

Once again, the Indigenous people of the world are expected to bear the weight of colonialism and capitalism, as greed affects the sea-life and all that is connected to it. The United Church of Christ is rising to the challenge and the invitation to be advocates for change alongside our siblings in the Pacific.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson serves as the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ.

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