



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM LEADERS

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 11 November 2017

[Multimedia]

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I offer a warm welcome to you, the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders. Your presence here is a visible sign of the rich variety of cultures and the great natural beauty of the Pacific region.

I share your concern for the peoples of the region, especially those exposed to the extreme environmental and climate events that are becoming more frequent and intense. Of concern too is the grave impact of rising sea levels and the disturbing and continuous deterioration of the barrier reef, a marine ecosystem of immense importance. In this regard, I remember the disquieting question posed almost thirty years ago by the Bishops of the Philippines: “Who turned the wonderworld of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of colour and life?” (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 41). A number of causes have led to this environmental decay and, sadly, many of them are due to short-sighted human activity connected with certain ways of exploiting natural and human resources, the impact of which ultimately reaches the ocean bed itself (cf. *ibid.*).

When we speak of rising sea levels, which “mainly affect impoverished coastal populations who have nowhere else to go” (*ibid.*, 48), our thoughts turn to the problem of global warming widely discussed in various international forums and meetings. In these very days COP-23, the twenty-third session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention Framework of the United Nations, is meeting in Bonn, under the presidency of one of the countries you represent, the Fiji Islands. It is my hope that the efforts of COP-23, and those yet to come, will always keep in mind the greater picture of that “earth without borders, with its highly rarified atmosphere”, as it was described by

one of the astronauts currently orbiting in the International Space Station, with whom I recently had a fascinating conversation.

You have come here from countries far distant from Rome, yet that vision of an “earth without borders” dissolves all geographic distances. It reminds us of the need for a global outlook, international cooperation and solidarity, and a shared strategy, which can prevent us from remaining indifferent in the face of grave problems such as the deterioration of the environment and of the health of the oceans, which is itself linked to the human and social deterioration experienced by humanity today.

Not only geographic and territorial distances, but also distances in time are dissolved by the realization that everything in the world is intimately connected (cf. *ibid.*, 16). Almost thirty years have passed since the Filipino Bishops’ appeal, and yet it cannot be said that the situation of the oceans and marine ecosystem has really improved. We still face any number of problems regarding, for example, the management of fishing resources, activities in shallow and deep waters, the situation of coastal communities and of fishing families, and the pollution caused by the accumulation of plastics and micro-plastics. “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? This question not only concerns the environment in isolation... When we ask ourselves what kind of world we want to leave behind, we think in the first place of its general direction, its meaning and its values” (*ibid.*, 160).

I thank you for your welcome visit and I invoke upon you and your countries God’s abundant blessings.

Thank you.