

Catholic Bishops Urge Care for Sea & People of West Papua

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Press Release: [Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania](#)

Statement from Executive Committee of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania

14 August 2017 - **Catholic Bishops urge care for the sea and support the indigenous people of West Papua.**

The Executive Committee of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania (Australia, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, New Zealand, CEPAC – the rest of the Pacific) is currently meeting in Auckland, New Zealand. We come from a multitude of island nation States spread throughout the Pacific Ocean.

We are **delighted to be here in Aotearoa New Zealand** and have enjoyed greatly the beauty of its nature and the hospitality of the people. **We thoroughly enjoyed our visit to De La Salle College in South Auckland**, the highlight of which was Mass for the entire school community. The boys' enthusiastic participation in the liturgy uplifted our hearts. **A further highlight was our presence at the City Mission on Friday evening where we served meals to the homeless, the mentally unwell and those suffering economic deprivation.** This was a humbling experience during which we felt deeply Christ's call to sit and walk alongside those who struggle or find themselves on the margins of society.

As Bishops of the Pacific, the place of the sea in the lives of the peoples we serve was a central focus of our meeting. **Our common ocean is teeming with life and goodness.** For many of our peoples the sea is their treasured source of nutrition, sustenance and livelihood. In solidarity with them, Psalm 107 resonates in our hearts: "those that do business in the great waters, they behold the world of the Lord and his wonders in the deep."

We are acutely aware of the impact of climate change on island nations and some of our number have been visiting communities and recording the destruction of shorelines affecting them. On a happier note, **we are heartened to learn of the systematic and coordinated opposition to seabed mining** which turns the ocean floor into a stage of exploitative destruction of ocean habitats.

Our interest in the "Blue Economy" is to uphold a model of development that respects the fundamental importance of sustainability that looks way beyond any perceived short term economic windfall. **Members of Parliament and local Governors and other civic authorities have a particular duty to promote long term economic and social development and to be vigilant in guarding against any attempts by international businesses to exploit our common resource.** We applaud government, community and private initiatives to develop water ecotourism and sustainable sea fishing. We are not "anti-development". We look to the common good and thus advocate for an integrated approach to development where local customary practices are respected and communities are assisted to grow employment opportunities.

A further focus has been the livelihood and cultural integrity of the people of West Papua. We do not promote a view in regard to independence. Indeed we believe that where this question becomes a single focus, care to uphold and strengthen local institutions of democracy may be overlooked. **We echo the call for quality education in Papua, for fair and transparent access to jobs, training programmes and employment, for respect of land titles, and for clear boundaries between the role of defence and police forces and the role of commerce.** The large majority of indigenous people of Papua seek peace and the various dialogue groups, advocating and witnessing to peaceful co-existence, are a source of hope for all.

Let us conclude with reference to **Pope Francis's inspiring encyclical Laudato Si** which he opens with the beautiful canticle of Saint Francis of Assisi who also reminds our generation that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.

We look forward to our Plenary Assembly in Port Moresby in April next year to which is invited all the bishops of Oceania. Our theme will be – ‘Care of our Common Home of Oceania: A sea of possibilities’.

Archbishop Sir John Cardinal Ribat MSC (President), Archbishop of Port Moresby, PNG.

Bishop Robert McGuckin (Deputy President) Bishop of Toowoomba, Australia.

Archbishop Michel Calvet SM, Archbishop of Noumea, New Caledonia.

Bishop Colin Campbell, Bishop of Dunedin, New Zealand.

Bishop Charles Drennan, Bishop of Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, Bishop of Parramatta, Australia.