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United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of SDG 14:  
**Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources  
for Sustainable Development**

Partnership Dialogue 3: ***Minimizing and addressing ocean acidification***

6 June 2017, 3-6 pm

Serene Highness Prince Albert II,  
Excellency Minister Agostinho Mondlane,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring you greetings from Pope Francis, and wish to convey to you his gratitude for this Conference, aimed at finding more effective measures and marshaling greater resources toward the conservation and sustainable use of our oceans, seas and marine resources. He extends his appreciation for the work being done by individuals, research centers and various international and national institutions to monitor and study the health of our oceans and seas, thereby contributing to better data collection and understanding of ocean acidification and to the search for the most effective measures to remedy it.

Growing carbon dioxide emissions increase the acidity of oceans, as oceans absorb at least a quarter of emitted carbon dioxide. If these present trends continue, this century may well witness an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, detergents and chemical pollutants continue to pour into our rivers and into seas and oceans. It is also therefore urgent to address the problem of ocean-bound polluted water.

We don't need to be reminded how vital the oceans and seas are to life on the planet, our common home. They not only provide food and raw materials, but also various essential environmental benefits such as air purification, regulation of climate and the global carbon cycle, waste management, and the maintenance of food chains and habitats critical to life on earth. Assuring their health and sustainability is thus in everyone's interest.

Pope Francis has regularly enunciated fundamental principles and actions that ought to guide our action to protect and care for the environment. For individual Catholics and for Catholic institutions throughout the world, these principles have become the roadmap inspiring and motivating them to action. I would like to focus my contribution to this discussion by illustrating these interconnected principles that frame the Holy See's perspective and action, not only to minimize and address ocean acidification, but to protect and care for the

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 24.

environment in general. Without pretending to be exhaustive, I would like to mention five of these interconnected guiding principles.

First, it is a moral imperative to take care of our environment. The environment is a gift entrusted to our responsible stewardship. Among the many considerations that flow from this fundamental principle are intergenerational solidarity and a focus not merely on rights but also on responsibilities. Pope Francis has repeatedly affirmed that intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.<sup>2</sup> Thus, while our care for our oceans and seas immediately benefits us, it is also a gift to future generations, sparing them from paying the extremely high price of the deterioration of our oceans, seas and marine resources.

Understanding the care of our oceans and seas as responsible stewardship helps us focus not just on our right to use the resources that oceans and seas provide us, but also on our obligation to conserve and use them in a sustainable manner. Much of the decline in the health of oceans is a result of emphasizing rights and autonomies to the detriment of personal and collective responsibilities. Effective regulatory frameworks to safeguard the health of our oceans are often blocked by those who are profiting the most from marine resources and who are intent on maintaining or increasing their advantages to the detriment of the poorer peoples and countries.

The second guiding principle is what Pope Francis calls integral ecology. The term articulates the fundamental multidimensionality of our relationships: with one another, with the environment as a whole, and with the Creator who has given us the gift of nature. In his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis mentions that an integral ecology encompasses the environmental, economic and social ecology; cultural ecology; the ecology of daily life; the principle of the common good; and justice between the generations.<sup>3</sup> In this understanding, the environment is not regarded as something separate from us or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of it, included in it and thus in constant symbiotic interaction with it. A crisis of the environment necessarily means a crisis for humanity. A crisis of our oceans and seas necessarily means a crisis for us.

The third principle is the need for an integrated approach to finding solutions to problems that are not merely environmental but also social. Ethical considerations must be integrated in our scientific approaches to environmental issues, because environmental deterioration and human and ethical degradation are closely linked. Science can quantify the acidification of oceans, predicting its negative consequences and proposing remedies, but it cannot provide the motivation for virtuous action. Technical solutions are never enough. “Leaving no one behind” is a call to solidarity and is an inspirational motivation that should spur all of us to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In brief, motivation to virtuous behavior is a valuable contribution that the integration of an ethical approach can and must bring to finding effective measures to minimize and address ocean acidification.

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<sup>2</sup> *Laudato Si'*, 159.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-162.

The fourth guiding principle is the fundamental role of education. Educating all from an early age about the marvels of nature leads to loving and caring for it. Education is all the more necessary in places where public service in proper waste disposal is either scarce or absent. I have observed that in countries and places where there is not proper public waste disposal, when it rains, people throw every kind of garbage — from plastic to old clothing, from metals to glasses — into rivers and waterways, so that the floodwaters would carry them away. Naturally, the garbage pollutes land water sources before choking our seas and oceans.

The Holy See uses its international reach and presence to educate about the need to care for our common home. Integral ecology has become required material in many Catholic schools and faith community activities to stimulate and sustain the love and care for the environment. It encourages initiatives toward achieving carbon footprint reduction and maximizing the use of renewable energy. It challenges small-scale entrepreneurs to put up or support eco-friendly businesses at the local or grassroots level. The Vatican City State is striving to give good example not just for Catholics but for all in striving to reduce its carbon footprint to a minimum and become totally carbon free.

The Catholic Church also relies on a vast interfaith network and collaboration with both non-governmental and governmental entities to educate children and adults on this responsibility. For example, the theme of the Holy See's Message to the Muslims for this time of Ramadan is "Christians and Muslims: Caring for our Common Home." Affirming that the common vocation to be guardians of God's handiwork is neither optional nor tangential but essential to pay homage to God, the Message invites to a "global conversion" to address adequately the challenge of the ecological crisis.

An integral part of this educational outreach to love and care for our oceans, regardless of whether one is a believer, is the challenge to change lifestyles and patterns of consumption that cause the degradation of the quality of our oceans and seas.

The fifth guiding principle is the need to dialogue and collaborate at all levels that can lead to common international, national and local decision-making, policy and action. We must bring into the conversation about the health of our oceans and seas the specific contributions of individuals and societies, State institutions and civic organizations. In an increasingly globalized and complex world, different perspectives are ever more intertwined and complementary, and all must be brought together to find the most effective solutions and measures. State policies and academic research are important and necessary, but work on the ground is most the important of all and the task of all.

Initiatives and projects to promote the health of our oceans and seas must be practical and participative to stimulate the willingness of all to contribute to this common task for the common good. Specific and targeted initiatives to fight the greatest and common pollutants of our oceans and seas could be wholesome and promote social cohesion. For instance, schools and communities could collect plastic, metal, glass and other waste materials that otherwise would end up in our oceans and rivers. Grassroots organizations could work with farming and mining industries to prevent industrial waste from polluting the water systems. Non-governmental organizations and public authorities could fruitfully collaborate to help poor

fishing villages fight the degradation of coastal ecosystems affecting their livelihood. If all of us really care for our environment, then there should be collaboration rather than opposition.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What kind of oceans and seas do we want to leave to future generations? What quality of water do we want flowing into our and their beaches, into our cities, villages and fields, into our sinks and showers? We can and must reverse the degradation of our oceans and seas. We are capable of the best, of rising above personal egoism and narrow national interests. This vast blue realm is God's gift for us. Let us be its responsible stewards.

I thank you.