



**1 July 2022**

## **Statement to UN Ocean Conference from Caritas Internationalis Delegation**

Inspired by the words, music, artwork and heartfelt plea of young and indigenous voices, and those closely connected to their communities and place, and people who are suffering, we wish to make a cry from the heart for the poor, for the Earth, and for future generations. This cry stands in contrast to technocratic, profit-led 'solutions' that would seek to fix the mess we have made of the Earth through solutions, without reference to the source of life and recognising the wisdom of ancient cultures, faith traditions, indigenous spirituality and wisdom that comes from the heart.

In *Laudato Si'* in 2015, Pope Francis said "our Sister, Mother Earth" was crying out to us because of the harm inflicted by our irresponsible abuse of the goods God endowed her with. Symptoms of sickness are evident in infertilities in the soil, scarcity of water, pollution in the air, and increased frequency and strength of extreme weather events. Our life-sustaining Mother-Earth is among the most abandoned and maltreated of all poor.

Caritas' concern for the ocean stems from the experience of the poor around the world, including coastal communities and people who depend on the sea for survival, sustenance and identity. This is especially the case in Oceania, where Caritas Oceania has been reporting on impact and response to environmental change since 2014, through the [Caritas State of the Environment for Oceania](#) reports.

Limitations on human economic activity in response to COVID have shown us how nature can restore herself **when given a chance**. Our experience working with communities across the world also speaks to this – when communities are closely aware of their dependence on a good relationship with the local environment.

For example, Caritas Tonga has seen the value of even small marine protection areas (MPAs) to protect and enhance fish stocks and fragile ecosystems. Caritas in Kenya has seen local communities work together. Youths have mobilized to clean coastlines and teach the coastal residents and visitors on the need to keep the coastline clean to protect oceanic life. The local Caritas' have engaged other partners in mangrove planting along the coast, especially in designated protected areas.

In light of these experiences at the grassroots and coastal edges of the world, we call for decision-makers at this conference and in the years ahead to:

- Transform social and economic systems in an integrated, just approach that addresses the inter-related environmental, social and economic crises we face and restores good relationships between peoples, the Ocean and coastal ecosystems.
- Make bold commitments and actions to strengthen ocean-based action under the UNFCCC multilateral process
- Respond to climate change with projects based on sound science, indigenous and local knowledge, and with the full participation and involvement of affected communities.
- Support urgent climate adaptation in collaboration with affected communities and remove barriers for communities to access climate finance.
- Take urgent action to keep global warming to below 1.5°C. This is crucial for survival of many island people. It requires unprecedented change across society. We call for an integrated approach to development that actively cares for the poor.
- Strengthen knowledge sharing across regions to learn from each other and find common solutions, in particular on resilience building and nature-based ocean actions for enhancement of implementation of Goal 14.
- Ban further seabed mining and exploration for exploitation. We must not add deep sea mining to our attack on Mother Earth, further undermining her ability to heal, and sustain and provide for us into the future.

On legal frameworks, Caritas is calling for further reflection on the Regional Seas' action plans and enhancement of linkages between conservation of coastal and marine ecosystems and community-led partnerships. The outcome of the conference should be linked to the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and enhance complementarity with existing climate commitments.

*...we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*

– Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para 49

