

**Intervention of H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza
Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the
United Nations**

*Preparatory meeting for the United Nations Conference to Support the
Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and
sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources*

Discussion on “Elements of a Call to Action”

New York, February 15-16, 2017

Distinguished Co-facilitators,

The Holy See believes that a new direction and bold actions are required to face the current ecological crisis.

In 2015, Pope Francis made an urgent appeal in his Encyclical Letter “Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home,” for people to courageously address the crisis. He not only raised awareness and understanding of the issues, he also advanced broader proposals for dialogue and action.

In response, the Catholic Church has initiated dialogues at international and grassroots level all over the world, around the need to care for our planet. Countless people, both inside and outside of the Church, have responded with new initiatives, especially at the local level.

Our delegation hopes that the Pope’s prompting will continue to provide a renewed impetus for civic and religious organizations to educate people in modifying their lifestyle and changing their consumption habits to help bring about an integral ecology, for the good of society and of the human person.

With regard to the Elements of a “Call to Action” under consideration, our delegation would like to offer the following six proposals:

First, the basis of any convincing “Call to Action” involves not just awareness of the empirical evidence of environmental degradation, but also a shared conviction about the moral need for each person to get involved. Regulatory norms, reformed economic and business practices, and better application of science and technology are all critical to a better care of our planet, but they alone are not enough. There is also the need for each person to hear the call toward greater individual commitment and

stewardship. My delegation therefore urges the preparatory committee to underline this element of a particular summons to each person as a sine qua non condition for any effective and credible call to action.

Second, a vigorous “Call to Action” should include the recognition that the ecological crisis has not affected all peoples of the world equally. The poor, especially those in the least developed countries and small island developing states, have been and continue to be unfairly burdened by the negative impacts of environment degradation caused, among other things, by ocean acidification, the destruction of coral reefs, the rise in sea level, unsustainable fishing methods, and pollution. Differentiated responsibilities in terms of the actions required must be recognized. Those most affected by the adverse effects of the degradation of oceans, seas and marine resources should be given priority in livelihood assistance. Just compensation and retraining assistance for livelihoods that are lost as a result of more effective measures to protect oceans, seas and marine resources should also be considered.

Third, a “Call to Action” should likewise emphasize the need for intergenerational solidarity to sustain long-term policies and practices. It must treat the lives and wellbeing of future generations as we wish to be treated now. Pope Francis affirms that such “intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us” (LS 159). The Portuguese Catholic bishops have urged us to fulfill this obligation of justice, affirming that “the environment is part of a logic of receptivity. It is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next”.^[1]

Fourth, a “Call to Action” should also appeal to the International Community to work for a more unified system of governance of the oceans, bolstered by more effective mechanisms for regulation, control, implementation and penalization. My delegation in particular urges States to agree on the underlying principle of common rights as well as shared responsibilities with respect to the whole of the oceans, including the water column.

Only with this mutual understanding of common rights and responsibilities can the global community take effective measures to deal with water quality, chemistry and temperature rise, as well as pollution, micro-plastics, and acidification. Laws regulating conservation and sustainable use will not

be effective in the long-term if they are based primarily on benefits and rights connected to marine resources rather than on the shared need and responsibility to work together for ocean health and biodiversity.

On a local or national level, in considering the lack of capacity of poorer countries and the inconsistency of regulations and legal frameworks governing many coastal and marine States and regions, it may be useful to consider steps to create and publish model environmental laws, as is done, for example, by UNCITRAL (United Nations Commission on International Trade Law) with respect to international trade laws.

Fifth, it would be opportune if a “Call to Action” considered the importance of marine spatial planning frameworks, especially for coastal cities and more intensely used metropolitan seas, in view of creating the necessary balance between human activities and biodiversity. My delegation agrees that improved management of resources and waste, marine renewable energy projects, and consideration of sustained financing to support ocean-related activities, are essential.

Sixth and lastly, a “Call to Action” should strike the delicate balance between food security, employment related to oceans and seas, and the protection of biodiversity and the marine environment.

Oceans and seas comprise over 70 percent of the earth’s surface. A “Call to Action” to conserve and sustainably use them, inviting each person to stewardship for this and future generations, is much needed and long overdue.

Thank you, Co-facilitators.

1. Portuguese Bishops’ Conference, Pastoral Letter Responsabilidade Solidária pelo Bem Comum (15 September 2003), 20.