



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS,
SIGNED BY THE CARDINAL SECRETARY OF STATE,
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE
FOURTH HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON
"OUR OCEAN, AN OCEAN FOR LIFE"**

*Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,*

I am pleased to convey the cordial greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis to all assembled for this Fourth International Conference on *Our Ocean, an Ocean for Life*.

Your Conference deals with complex and interrelated issues such as the health of the oceans, as well as the coordination and management of various activities above or under the seas. His Holiness takes this occasion to encourage a concerted effort to address a number of pressing issues that directly affect the welfare of countless men and women: human trafficking, slave labour and inhumane working conditions associated with the fishing industry and commercial shipping, the standard of living and development opportunities in coastal communities and the families of those who fish, and the situation of islands threatened by rising sea levels.

Reflecting on these issues inevitably leads to two conclusions. The first is a recognition of our duty to care for the oceans as part of an integrated vision of human development. The second concerns the need for multilateral governance aimed at the pursuit of the common good and equipped to operate at the global and regional levels, guided by international law and inspired by the principle of subsidiarity and respect for the dignity of each human person (cf. [*Laudato Si'*](#), 174).

The oceans are the common heritage of the human family. Only with a deep sense of humility, wonder and gratitude can we rightly speak of the ocean as "ours". To care for this common inheritance necessarily involves rejecting cynical or indifferent ways of acting. We cannot pretend to ignore the problems of ocean pollution resulting, for example, from plastic and micro-plastics

that enter the food chain and cause grave consequences for the health of marine and human life. Nor can we remain indifferent before the loss of coral reefs, essential places for the survival of marine biodiversity and the health of the oceans, as we witness a marvellous marine world being transformed into an underwater cemetery, bereft of colour and life (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 41).

The oceans unite us and summon us to work together. As His Holiness noted in *Laudato Si'*, “everything is interconnected”. Our world today needs to see that the oceans are a crucial resource in the fight against poverty and climate change, both of which are intrinsically linked (cf. *Message of Pope Francis to COP22 to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change*, 10 November 2016). There is a need for new technologies to foresee various problems involving the proper governance of the oceans, but also for a change in the way we live, and offering new models of production and consumption, in order to promote an authentic and integral human development that values good governance and embraces it responsibly.

For all too long, it has been thought that the sheer vastness of the oceans would allow for negligence, the disposal of toxic waste, and freedom from oversight by the authorities. For all too long, no consideration has been given to the grave effects on marine and coastal ecosystems of the often unregulated exploitation of certain ocean resources. I think, for example, of complex and invasive means of extracting mineral resources from the seabed, which, thanks to advances in technology, are increasingly viable and competitive. For too long, attention has been focused on situations of crime and human tragedy at sea, without courageously and adequately facing their causes, which are often to be found on land. It is time to work with greater responsibility to safeguard our oceans, our common home, and our brothers and sisters, today and in the future. The book of Genesis teaches that in the beginning “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (1:2). This verse reminds us that the oceans hold particular importance for many religions. Spirituality can provide powerful incentives for the protection of the oceans, and, more generally, for the care of all creation (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 216). “Science and religion, with their distinctive approaches to understanding reality, can enter into an intense dialogue fruitful for both” (*Laudato Si'*, 62).

The oceans remind us of the need to educate for the covenant between humanity and the environment (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 209-215). In this regard, efforts should be made to train young people to care for the oceans but also, wherever possible, helping them to grow in knowledge, appreciation and contemplation of their vastness and grandeur. For the contemplation of creation can teach us valuable lessons and be an unending a source of inspiration (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 85).

With the assurance of my own deep interest in the deliberations of the Conference, I have the honour to reiterate Pope Francis’s prayerful good wishes and to convey his blessing.

Yours sincerely,
Secretary of State,

From the Vatican, 27 September 2017

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