

FCBCO Summary – 14 April 2018

– James van Schie

Last night the bishops of Oceania, Cardinal Pietro Parolin (Vatican Secretary of State), and members of the Catholic Professional's Society joined Prime Minister Peter O'Neil for a special celebratory dinner in Port Moresby. Prime Minister O'Neill spoke about the invaluable role of the Catholic Church in PNG both in the humanitarian services provided and also in the positive values the Church continues to foster in the people of PNG. He renewed his invitation to Pope Francis to come to PNG and also announced that a permanent diplomatic mission to the Holy See in Rome would be established by PNG.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin addressed the dinner expressing the Holy Father's solidarity with the victims of the recent earthquakes in the Southern Highlands of PNG. Cardinal Parolin urged the business people present to apply Catholic Social teaching in their business practice and encouraged both business and government to work hard for the integral human development of the people of PNG.

Both Prime Minister O'Neil and Cardinal Parolin expressed their hope in the cause of the Canonization of Blessed Peter To Rot. Peter To Rot is the first native Papua New Guinean to be declared and it is widely hoped his extraordinary Christian witness will be recognised in Sainthood.

Today, the bishops resumed meetings on Day 3 of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania ('FCBCO') in Port Moresby.

Prof Chalapan from PNG University presented the science on deep sea bed mining and outlined the known risks associated with this experimental form of resource extraction. He urged the government of PNG to reconsider the 'Solwara' projects. Chalapan told the bishops that the project is based on flawed research, an absence of proper health and economic cost/benefit analysis, and lack of protection of traditional land owners.

The 'Solwara Warriors' also presented to the bishops and set out grave concerns about this project and the long-term damage to human and environmental flourishing as a result of deep sea bed mining. The local people from the affected region have been excluded from the decision making process.

New Zealand priest Msgr Gerard Burns, President of Caritas Oceania, one of the Church's key development agencies, spoke about the active role this agency is playing in caring for creation and supporting flourishing human development in the region.

Workshops for the day also included 'Priesthood in Oceania' led by PNG Bishop Rochus Tatama msc and a session on the insights of Pope Francis by Bishop Vincent Long of Parramatta, Australia.

Background on speakers

- **Prof Kaluwin Chalapan** – currently Acting Dean of School of natural and Physical sciences and the Professor of Environment Science and Head of Environmental Sciences Geography discipline. He has

developed the PNG Centre for Climate Change and Sustainable Development and research programmes for graduates on Millennium Development Gaps and human development.

- **Monsignor Gerard Burns** is the Vicar General for the Archdiocese of Wellington and holds a Masters of International Relations, Victoria University, 2008. He is President of Caritas Oceania and has been appointed by Pope Francis as a member of the executive board of Caritas Internationalis.

Media enquiries.

Fr Ambrose Pereira SDB