

# PNG facing climate change disaster:

## Cardinal Ribat

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Cardinal John Ribat (CNS/Bob Roller)

People of Papua New Guinea face severe threats from rising sea levels caused by climate change, the country's first cardinal said during a visit to Washington this week. Source: *The Tablet*.

Cardinal John Ribat, archbishop of Port Moresby, shared stories of his fellow Papuans who have been forced to move inland from ancestral lands along the ocean as rising seas have inundated their homes.

The same is true on hundreds of tiny islands throughout the Pacific basin, he told CNS yesterday, before a visit to Capitol Hill to plead for action to protect the environment and address climate change.

Ocean levels have risen in recent decades, overtaking low lying areas on tiny island nations and large land masses alike. Scientists attribute higher seas to melting polar ice as greenhouse gases from the burning of fossil fuels accumulate in the Earth's atmosphere, causing the planet to warm.

“We are responsible to voice this ... If nothing is happening to us in the way of help, our people will be faced with disaster,” Cardinal Ribat said. The Church must accompany people who face any type of difficulty, he added.

Since being appointed the country’s first cardinal in 2016, Cardinal Ribat has focused much of his ministry on addressing climate change. He has called the environment the most important issue for the Church in PNG to address because of the risks facing thousands of people in the country of eight million.

“We’re accompanying people through this,” the Cardinal said, calling climate change a family issue that connects the words of Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation on the family, *Amoris Laetitia*, and his encyclical on the human relationship with the environment, *Laudato Si’*.

“The issue for us is the families are suffering,” Cardinal Ribat said. “They are the ones that will be in more of a struggle.”

Rising seas are affecting islands through the western Pacific, and Cardinal Ribat, who is president of the Federation of Catholic Episcopal Conferences of Oceania, said his fellow bishops agreed that immediate action is needed to assist people who are being forced to relocate.

"Most of the islands are in danger," he told an audience at The Catholic University of America on Tuesday.

Drinking water also is at risk, he said. Some communities have seen their wells infiltrated by sea water, causing an increase in salinity, and some people have had to abandon traditional gardens, he said.

Cardinal Ribat arrived in the US to speak on the environmental impact of climate change at St Ignatius Loyola Parish in New York City on 12 March. A member of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, he also received an award from the parish for his commitment to upholding the principles of Jesuit spirituality in his ministry.

He decided to add a stop on Capitol Hill, where, he said, he hoped that the stories of the climate challenges confronting average people will influence members of Congress to act to protect the environment.

The cardinal also expressed concern that US President Donald Trump had committed to withdrawing the country from the Paris climate accord reached in 2015.

"Pulling out of this is not realising the struggle we are going through," he explained. "I don't think they are fully aware of the costs of this. The pulling out by the president is so difficult for us to understand. We are the victims of what is happening."

Papua New Guinea is an overwhelmingly Christian nation. About 27 percent of residents are Catholic and 70 percent are Protestant. The remainder follow Baha'i, Islam or indigenous religions.

Cardinal Ribat's visit was coordinated by the Franciscan Action Network, Global Catholic Climate Movement, Catholic Climate Covenant, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic University's School of Theology and Religious Studies.

FULL STORY

[Papua New Guinea's first Cardinal says climate change is 'disaster' for his people](#) (*The Tablet*)

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