

## **Welcome Remarks** Creation Summit, Diocese of Phoenix Bishop Peter Dai Bui

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I want to begin not with a statistic, but with a memory.

I grew up on an island in the Gulf of Thailand called Phú Quốc. My earliest memory of that place is simple: I am playing on a white sand beach, and nearby, my father is repairing his fishing boat. I can still see the color of that water. Clear and blue, almost unreal, the kind of blue that makes you wonder if you invented it. I can still feel the sand. I can still hear the sound of my father working.

I did not have words for it then. But I knew, the way a child knows things before language, that this place was beautiful. That the world, when you truly look at it, looks back at you. That there is something sacred in the sheer fact that beauty exists.

I carry that beach with me. And I also carry something else.

I carry the memory of communities in the Pacific, in Tonga, where the rising ocean is not a distant worry or a policy debate, but a daily, encroaching reality. Where families are already making impossible decisions about where they will go when their homeland disappears beneath the water. I carry the faces of people in Bangkok, in Hong Kong, in the highlands and coastlines of South America, where I worked for years with Pontifical Cor Unum, seeing how quickly environmental stress becomes humanitarian crisis.

And I carry the memory of the Horn of Africa during the drought.

Through Cor Unum, I encountered what that drought actually meant, not in reports, not in numbers, but in faces. Mothers who had walked for days across cracked earth, carrying their babies, searching for food and water. Some of those mothers had to stop along the way. They buried their children halfway through the journey. And then they kept walking.

Because what else do you do?

What I have learned, across all of those places, is this: the earth and the poor share the same wound.

I want to stay with that for a moment. Because it is easy to say and hard to truly absorb.

We tend to organize these as separate concerns: environmental issues in one column, human suffering in another, separate committees, separate budgets, separate conversations. But the people I have met across the world do not have that luxury. For them, the two were never separate. The drought did not just damage the landscape; it emptied the village. The rising water did not just threaten the coastline; it ended a way of life handed down for generations. The heat does not only make summers uncomfortable. It kills. And it kills in a particular order.

It kills the poorest first.

When the water dries up, it is not the wealthy who go thirsty first. When the floods come, it is not the powerful who lose their homes first. When the temperature rises, and here in Phoenix we know something about that, it is the farmworker in the field, the elderly woman in the apartment without air conditioning, the unhoused man sleeping on concrete, who bears the cost in their body. In their life. Sometimes with their life.

The wound in creation and the wound in human dignity are not parallel wounds. They are the same wound, cutting through the same flesh. Pope Francis named it plainly in *Laudato Si*: we are not faced with two separate crises, but one complex crisis, social and environmental together. One wound. One cry. One response demanded of us.

This is also the wisdom at the heart of *Pacem in Terris*. Peace is not merely the absence of war. It is the presence of conditions in which human beings can truly flourish. And those conditions include the health of the earth itself. You cannot have peace where there is no water. You cannot have dignity where the land can no longer sustain life. You cannot have hope where mothers are burying their children halfway to the well.

I am grateful that this room holds people from different faith traditions. The care of creation and the dignity of every human person are convictions that arise wherever people understand that the world is not ours to consume, but ours to tend together. Whatever tradition has brought you here, you already know that. That is why you came.

My motto as a bishop comes from the First Letter to the Corinthians: *Omnia in caritate fiant*, "Let all that you do be done in love."

That is the spirit I hope we carry through this day. Not anxiety alone, though the urgency is real. Not despair, though the challenges are serious. But love: love that sees clearly, refuses to look away, and is willing to act.

The water I grew up beside, that blue so clear it seemed invented, belongs now to every child being born today. We hold it in trust. What we did not make, we must not consume. What we received as gift, we pass on as gift.

What we choose to do together, in this room, on this day, is part of that.