NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Film screening to raise awareness of plight of islanders

Sharon Abercrombie | Aug. 20, 2012 Eco Catholic

More than 100 Catholic colleges and universities will walk in the footsteps of the first climate change refugees in early October. They will watch "Sun Come Up," [1] a 2011 Academy Award-nominated documentary that presents the plight of 2,500 inhabitants of the Carteret Islands, an island paradise 50 miles north of Bougainville, Papua, New Guinea.

The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change is sponsoring the film as a way to celebrate the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology, said Dan Misleh, the coalition's executive director.

For thousands of years, the ocean surrounding the Carterets had been a gentle mother. Then, in 2007, it began washing ashore, destroying precious croplands, permanently ruining the soil. Within the next decade, the islands will disappear forever under the water. The residents will have to move before they starve. Or drown.

"Sun Come Up" chronicles three weeks in the lives of the five families who have volunteered to be the first to resettle and to scout out land for their folks back home. We see them cast off in boats from Carteret, then take to the Bougainville countryside in bumpy vehicles. Their quest brings them to 15 towns. They encounter a variety of receptions, including outright refusal, indifference and thinly veiled hostility. One town warned that a portion of the population still suffers from the after-effects caused by 10 years of civil war. Many inhabitants are still armed, the villagers warned.

"Sun Come Up" is packed with heart-wrenching scenes. The 40-minute film unwinds like the best of novels, and viewers will immediately empathize with the heroines' and heroes' stories. One in particular: Four-year-old Cornelia sobs against her mother's shoulder. She doesn't like the new place they have come to at all, with its strangers, their noisy cars and the garbage scattered along the dusty road. "She wants to go home and wash in the sea," explains her mother with sadness.

Finally, the Carteret refugees find a community that accepts them with kindness, joy and celebration. It is a Catholic parish in the Tinputz region, where local families agree to make room for them. In a scene that could be right out of scripture, the parishioners hold a symbolic wedding between themselves and the Carteret families.

Since the film's debut, the Bougainville Catholic Diocese has resettled 12 families. It is one of many efforts going on right now to assist in a widespread relocation effort of the rest of the islanders. Other groups and nonprofit and government organizations are also helping, Misleh said.

Misleh said one group helping in the relocation is Tulele Peisa, which means "sailing the waves on our own," run by Carteret Islander Ursula Rakova, who is featured prominently in "Sun Come Up." In a Brisbane diocesan paper write-up from the *Catholic Leader*, Rakova tells how the predominantly Catholic Carteret Islands have been suffering the loss of crops and water supplies from the rising seas.

Brisbane Mercy Sr. Wendy Flannery's community and Catholic Religious Australia have been strong supporters

of Tulele Peisa.

In a *Catholic Leader* story from 2010, Flannery said the church's teachings call for a new awareness around environmental problems.

"The ecological conversion to which our Church calls us requires a new look at our relationship with the divine source of all life, and an examination of the basic ways we live and relate to one another, and to other creatures, on our common home of planet Earth," she said.

The October film viewings of "Sun Come Up" will be followed by a scholars' conference, "Environmental Justice and Climate Change: Assessing Pope Benedict XVI's Ecological Vision for the Catholic Church in the United States," Nov. 8-10. The conference is co-sponsored by the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, The Catholic University of America and the USCCB, and Bishop Bernard Unabali of Bougainville will present the keynote address.

The screening sponsored by the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change comes with educational packets designed for Catholic colleges, universities, high schools, youth groups, dioceses and parishes. The packets include a step-by-step guide inspired by Catholic social teaching to spur discussion after the film and encourage viewers to take action in response to the unfolding climate crisis, Misleh said.

The coalition invites parishes, high schools and youth groups to participate, too. Thanks to a recent grant from the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, the coalition has secured a number of DVDs at a discounted rate to mail to registrants. To sign up, go to org2.democracyinaction.org [2]. For further information, email Misleh at danmisleh@catholicsandclimatechange.org. For a downloadable flyer and a film preview, go to the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change's website [3].

Click here for the flier for the event. [4]

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-30 02:33*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/film-screening-raise-awareness-plight-islanders

Links:
[1] http://www.suncomeup.com/film/Home.html
[2] http://www2.democracyinaction.org
[3] http://catholicclimatecovenant.org
[4] http://ncrnews.org/documents/SunComeUp.pdf