Pope Francis: “Indigenous peoples have right to preserve cultural identity”

Pope Francis sends a message to participants in a UN meeting on Indigenous Peoples, and stresses their right to preserve their cultural identity and the natural resources to which they are closely linked.

“Land, water, and food are not mere commodities but the very foundation of life and the bond of [indigenous] peoples with nature.”

Pope Francis offered that reminder on Monday in a message sent to the 7th Indigenous Peoples’ Forum organized by the UN’s International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

The forum takes place in Rome on February 10-11 under the theme: “Indigenous Peoples’ right to self-determination: a pathway for food security and sovereignty”.

In his message, the Pope said indigenous peoples have the right to preserve their identity but noted that this right is severely threatened by the increasing seizures of farmland by multinational corporations and states.

These seizures cause much harm to indigenous peoples and put at risk communities’ right to a dignified life, he lamented.

“The defense of the right to preserve one’s culture and identity requires the recognition of the value of their contribution to society, as well as the safeguarding of their existence and the natural resources essential for their livelihood,” he said.

Pope Francis added that defense of indigenous peoples’ rights is a matter of justice, as well as a way to guarantee a sustainable future for all humanity.

“Driven by our sense of belonging to the human family,” he said, “we can ensure that future generations enjoy a world in harmony with the beauty and goodness that guided God’s hands in creation.”

The Pope praised the heritage of indigenous peoples, saying their ancestral traditions reveal a “horizon of hope in our present time, marked by intense and complex challenges and numerous tensions.”

In conclusion, Pope Francis prayed that efforts to protect the rights and traditions of indigenous peoples may bear fruit.

“I pray to Almighty God that these efforts,” he said, “may serve as an inspiration to the leaders of nations so that appropriate measures are taken to ensure that the human family walks together in pursuit of the common good, leaving no one excluded or forgotten.”

* *Article published in Vatican News. By Devin Watkins. Photo: Vatican Media.*