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## Australia floods. Msgr. Vincent Long (Parramatta): “Ecological conversion to save the planet from devastation”

Dramatic news reached SIR this morning from the dioceses of New South Wales, Australia, hit by a “one-in-a-50-year” flood, according to local authorities. Some 18,000 people have been evacuated, and torrential rain caused rivers and dams to overflow. The diocese of Armidale is taking stock of the damage. This morning floodwater cut off the main bridge of Moree, in northern New South Wales, dividing the town in two, while all roadways are inaccessible. Towns and villages are completely cut off. The number of evacuated families is still impossible to quantify. A priest participating in a clergy meeting in Armidale on Tuesday was unable to return to his parish. The town of Tamworth reported severe flooding that cut off several roads, but the situation is now improving. A number of streets have been closed around Tamworth, leaving many local households isolated on their farms. But there are also stories of solidarity. Some staff members of Centacare New England North West (a community service agency) were evacuated from their homes on Tuesday evening, but they still turned up to work on Wednesday and Thursday to help people affected by the flooding. Pope Francis extended his solidarity at the end of Wednesday’s general audience: “I am close to the people and families who are affected by this calamity, especially those who have seen their homes destroyed. I give encouragement to those who are doing everything possible to search for those who are missing and to bring aid.” SIR contacted Msgr. **Vincent Long Van Nguyen**, Bishop of Parramatta, through the spokesperson of the Australian Bishops' Conference.



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[We are grateful for the words, prayers and support of the Holy Father. His message of solidarity touched the hearts of all those hit by this latest calamity in the state of New South Wales and nationwide. \*\*How is the situation now?\*\* Thank God, the situation is now improving. The rainfalls have stopped and the water level is slowly falling. Obviously, the damages caused by the heavy downpour will have to be remediated, and restoration work starts now. People must move on with their lives. \*\*How many people were evacuated? Were there casualties?\*\* The rainfall affected a large area, several homes were affected and many families were evacuated. There are also reports of casualties. We extend our prayers for them and their families. \*We were informed that a diocesan priest was miraculously saved from the waters after having been stranded during a pastoral visit to a diseased parishioner\* \*\*How are the churches and their organisations supporting the evacuees?\*\* We are offering support through our community services. We have made school and parish classrooms available as emergency evacuation shelters. Our main concern now is to support long-term reconstruction, which involves working closely with community leaders and local congregations. We are also in the process of creating programmes that draw on a specific psycho-social recovery model to address local emergencies.](#)





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It has been a time of calamity for Australia. First the drought, then the forest fires and now the floods. No doubt these extreme weather events are aggravated by man-made behaviours such as deforestation and the burning of fossil fuels that are having an increasingly severe impact on the environment. Australia can hardly claim to be a responsible country in addressing the moral challenge of our age while it still lags behind other nations in terms of climate change action and continues subsidising antiquated polluting industries. **What should be done?** Courageous, knowledgeable and determined leadership is needed to encourage people to embrace lifestyles and mindsets that are critical to saving our planet from utter devastation. We call on decision-makers to realize that we have one and only one home to live in, which we must care for and protect. We are being asked to step beyond outdated living and behaviour patterns, both individually and collectively. The ecological crisis demands a conversion of heart and a change of lifestyle, we must have the courage to align ourselves with God's plan for the world. Only by acting in the best interests of the environment, of the poor and of future generations can we save this planet from devastation.

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