

## *Flores Island's natural landscapes 'disturbed' by geothermal transition. The views of Archbishop Paulus Budi Kleven*

**(30 January 2025)**

The complex relationships between natural landscapes and geothermal plants are at the centre of wide-ranging debates within the framework of numerous ecological transition initiatives. In fact, specialists from various disciplines appear to be confronting each other in the continuous search for and definition of effective sustainable solutions, which are not only limited to promoting a 'change' in energy supply techniques, but which are also capable of bringing together environmental, social and economic demands within a specific field of action.

It is not surprising, however, that the implications generated by the geothermal transition with respect to the 'natural' use of the landscape continue to nourish in global society the perception of the risk that the territory concerned may have irreparable long-term repercussions.

This emerged most recently from the opposition expressed by the Archbishop of Ende, Paulus Budi Kleven, to the construction of geothermal power plants on the island of Flores and other locations in the Indonesian archdiocese in a video statement released last Jan. 10<sup>1</sup>.

In particular, these projects are part of the broader Energy Plan for Indonesia, which due to its geological conformation is considered an ideal site for the exploration and utilisation of the subsoil to find renewable resources. Activities that the Indonesian government appears to support to a significant degree, both through the provision of simpler administrative procedures and easier access to investment in the sector.

The 'inconveniences' associated with the realisation of these geothermal transition processes – although moderated by the rapid technological evolution of energy infrastructures – appear, however, to affect the natural balances that characterise the island of Flores, as well as the social and economic life of the local communities themselves, which are mainly dedicated to agricultural cultivation and therefore deeply tied to the Earth.

In this regard, the point of view of Archbishop Kleven was of considerable impact. For the first time within the Catholic Church in Indonesia, the Archbishop emphasised precisely the need for the energy transition objectives inherent to the territory of his archdiocese to be reviewed and evaluated in view of the physical characteristics and cultural identity of the places. The importance was thus emphasised that the 'sustainable' exploitation of the Earth must always be inspired by a harmonious vision of the planet and projected towards the achievement of the common good, without instead implying forms of degradation very often fuelled by the economic logic of the market.

What Archbishop Kleven emphasised is fully in line with the attention to the theme of the custody of creation that the Magisterium of the Catholic Church has developed and deepened in recent years.

On the more specific topic of the search for and use of renewable energies, on several occasions Pope Francis, in urging the urgency of the transition from fossil fuels to zero-impact sources, has dwelt precisely on the 'paradoxes' of the energy transition. While there is no doubt that geothermal energy can contribute to the achievement of sustainability goals, it is equally

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<sup>1</sup> The published video statement of the Indonesian Archbishop can be found at the following link: <https://www.licas.news/2025/01/20/indonesian-archbishop-denounces-geothermal-projects-over-environmental-concerns/>.

certain that the impacts on the environment and on people's community life – such as, for example, the reduction of water resources due to the extraction of geothermal fluids and the microseismicity triggered by the extraction and re-injection of fluids into the geothermal reservoir – are not particularly significant.

Also in the light of the teachings contained in the Encyclical '*Laudato si'*' and the Apostolic Exhortation '*Laudate Deum*', the search for an authentic and sustainable relationship with nature, which can develop in respect of the profound link between personal, social and environmental balance, therefore denotes the importance of promoting and realising a responsible geothermal transition, which fulfils the task of supplying energy, but «with methods of exploiting resources that avoid producing environmental imbalances that would cause a process of degradation and pollution, from which the whole of humanity of today and tomorrow would be seriously injured»<sup>2</sup>.

In this path, albeit complex, the Indonesian Archbishop's commitment concretely reveals the active contribution of religions in the definition and development of transition policies and investment strategies that are oriented towards the respect of 'natural landscapes' and the peculiar connection with host communities.

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Discourse to participants at the meeting for executives of major companies in the oil natural gas and other energy-related businesses*, 9 June 2018.