EPA Administrator Pruitt Engages Vatican on Climate Change

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1. (SBU) Key Points:

- The Holy See remains committed to the Paris Agreement and is "skeptical" about the U.S. decision to withdraw.
- However, the Vatican FM was open-minded about the power of private enterprise and state and local movements to reduce carbon emissions.
- The Holy See is most concerned about the effects the decision will have on other countries' commitments to reduce their emissions.

Holy See "Skeptical" of U.S. Withdrawal…

2. (SBU) U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt engaged Holy See FM Paul Gallagher on the issue of climate change in a June 9 meeting at the Vatican. Pruitt explained the reasons for U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and emphasized that the United States remained committed to addressing climate change and other environmental problems through innovation and free enterprise. Gallagher noted that he had spoken with President Trump about the issue during the President's visit. He underlined the Holy See's commitment to the Paris Agreement and said that the Holy See was "skeptical" about U.S. withdrawal from the agreement given the significant time and energy required to reach even a non-binding accord. Gallagher explained that the Holy See's approach to environmental issues is rooted in the Church's ethical and moral principles.

…but Open Minded on Power of Private Enterprise to Address Climate Change

3. (SBU) Gallagher noted that domestically the reaction to the Administration's decision seems to have galvanized state and local governments and private individuals to address climate change directly themselves, which he saw as positive. "Most Americans seem to like small government, so if the problem of carbon emissions could be addressed through private enterprise, why not?" he said, indicating an open mind to alternative approaches to addressing climate change.

Holy See Concerned About Impact of Decision on Other Countries, Transnational Effects of Climate Change

4. (SBU) Gallagher told Pruitt that what worried the Holy See most was the broader impact of the U.S. decision and the possibility that some countries would cite U.S. withdrawal as an excuse to not fulfill their own commitments to reduce carbon emissions. "There is a danger in not having the Americans engaged within the same framework as everyone else," he said. Gallagher mentioned that the Holy See was also concerned about the impact of climate change on migration flows and as a driver of conflict between countries. Finally, Gallagher was encouraged that the United States was assisting other countries to adopt technology to produce energy from less carbon-intensive resources, such as natural gas.

Comment: Acknowledging Differences but Maintaining the Door Open for Dialogue

5. (SBU) Although Archbishop Gallagher indicated the Holy See disagreed with the U.S. decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, he was more interested in engaging Administrator Pruitt on the reasons for withdrawal and the alternative approaches available to address climate change concerns than he was in lecturing the U.S. or condemning the decision. This is in keeping with the Holy See's approach to maintaining a constructive dialogue where differences exist and to pragmatically pursue cooperation on areas of common ground.