



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD FOOD DAY 2012

*To Mr José Graziano da Silva
Director-General of the FAO*

1. This year World Food Day is being celebrated while the effects of the economic crisis are increasingly affecting primary needs — including the fundamental right of each person to sufficient and healthy food — and are aggravating in particular the situation of those who live in conditions of poverty and underdevelopment. It is a context similar to the one that inspired the creation of the FAO and which demands the commitment of national and international institutions to free humanity from hunger through agricultural development and the growth of rural communities. The gradual disengagement and excessive competition that are in fact being brought to bear on malnutrition, risk causing people to forget that only shared, common solutions can provide adequate responses to the expectations of people and peoples.

I consequently greet with special pleasure the decision to dedicate this Day to reflection on the theme “Agricultural Cooperatives: Key to Feeding the World”. It is not only a matter of supporting cooperatives as an expression of a different form of economic and social organization, but also of perceiving them as a real means of international action. The experience of many countries shows, in fact, that in addition to the impetus they give to farming, cooperatives are a means to enable farmers and rural populations to intervene at crucial moments and at the same time are an effective way to achieve this integral development, of which the person is both the foundation and the goal.

Indeed guaranteeing freedom from hunger means being aware that the activity of institutions and the contribution of committed men and women can achieve satisfactory results only through actions and structures inspired by solidarity and geared to participation. In this regard agricultural cooperatives are a practical example, since they are required to achieve not only the required standards of production and distribution but also a more general growth of rural areas and of the

communities that live in them.

2. Cooperation in its deepest sense indicates the individual person's need to associate with others in order to pursue new goals with them in the social, economic, cultural and religious spheres. It is a question of a dynamic and varied situation, called not only to respond to immediate material needs but also to contribute to the prospects of each community.

Given the priority that is due to the human dimension, agricultural cooperatives can surmount the exclusively technical aspect of farming by reassessing their centrality in economic activity and thereby encouraging responses adapted to the real local needs. It is a question of an alternative view to that determined by internal and international measures, which seem to have as their sole aim profit, the defence of markets, the non-alimentary use of farming products and the introduction of new production techniques without the necessary precautions.

In the face of an ever increasing demand for food which necessarily combines the quality and quantity of foodstuffs, the work of agricultural cooperatives can represent something more than a mere aspiration by actually showing a possible way to satisfy the demands of a growing world population. Their increasingly consolidated presence can moreover put an end to the speculative trends that are now even affecting basic staples destined for human nourishment and can contain the monopolization of cultivable areas which in various regions is forcing farmers to abandon their land since, as individuals, they have no possibility of imposing their rights.

3. The Catholic Church, as is known, also considers work and cooperative enterprises as ways to live an experience of unity and solidarity that can overcome differences and even social conflicts between individual people and between the various groups. For this reason she has always supported the model of cooperatives with her teaching and her action because she is convinced that their activity is not limited solely to the financial dimension but also contributes to the human, social, cultural and moral growth of those who belong to them and of the community into which they are integrated.

Indeed cooperatives are not a practical expression of barren complementarity but rather of true subsidiarity; a principle that the Church's social doctrine places as the foundation of a correct relationship between people, society and institutions. Subsidiarity, in fact, guarantees the person's ability and original contribution while preserving his or her aspirations in the spiritual and material dimension, by keeping in the right perspective the promotion of the common good and the protection of the individual's rights.

Looking at situations where conflicts or natural disasters limit agricultural work, the irreplaceable role of women deserves a special thought: they are often required to direct the cooperatives' activities, to maintain family ties and to safeguard their precious knowledge and skills proper to the rural world.

In a world that is seeking the appropriate interventions to overcome the difficulties of the economic crisis and to give globalization an authentically human meaning, the experience of cooperatives certainly represents this new type of economy at the service of the person, namely, that can encourage forms of sharing and of free-giving which are the fruits, respectively, of solidarity and brotherhood (*Caritas in Veritate*, n. 39). For this reason it is indispensable that public authorities, working at the national and international levels, prepare the legislative and financial instruments to ensure that in rural areas cooperatives may be effective tools for agricultural production, food security, social change and a greater improvement of living conditions. In this new context it is desirable that the young generations be able to look to their future with fresh confidence, while preserving their links with work in the fields, with the rural world and with the traditional values.

In renewing the attention of the Church and the commitment of her institutions so that humanity may truly be free from hunger, I invoke upon you, Mr Director-General, on the representatives of the nations accredited to the FAO, and on all those who work in the Organization and contribute to obtaining its goals, the most abundant blessings of Almighty God.

From the Vatican, 16 October 2012

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