



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO FAO ON THE OCCASION  
OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON FOOD SECURITY\***

*FAO Headquarter, Rome  
Monday, 16 November 2009*

*Mr President,  
Ladies and Gentlemen!*

1. I was very pleased to receive an invitation from Mr Jacques Diouf, Director General of FAO, to speak at the opening session of this World Summit on Food Security. I greet him warmly and I thank him for his kind words of welcome. I greet the distinguished authorities present and all the participants. Echoing the sentiments of my venerable predecessors [Pope Paul VI](#) and [Pope John Paul II](#), I should like once more to express my esteem for the work of FAO, which the Catholic Church and the Holy See follow attentively, taking a keen interest in the day-to-day work that is carried out there. Thanks to your generous engagement, aptly expressed in your motto *Fiat Panis*, the development of agriculture and food security remain among the key priorities of international political action. I am confident that this same spirit will inform the decisions taken at the present Summit, and those that will follow later, in the common desire to win the battle against hunger and malnutrition in the world as quickly as possible.

2. The international community is currently facing a grave economic and financial crisis. Statistics bear witness to the *dramatic growth in the number of people suffering from hunger*, made worse by the rise in price of foodstuffs, the reduction in economic resources available to the poorest peoples, and their limited access to markets and to food – notwithstanding the known fact that the world has enough food for all its inhabitants. Indeed, while low levels of agricultural production persist in some regions, partly owing to climate change, sufficient food is produced on a global scale to satisfy both current demands and those in the foreseeable future. From these data we may deduce that there is no cause-and-effect relationship between population growth and hunger,

and this is further demonstrated by the lamentable destruction of foodstuffs for economic gain. In the Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* I pointed out that, “Hunger is not so much dependent on lack of material things as on shortage of social resources, the most important of which are institutional. What is missing, in other words, is a network of economic institutions capable of guaranteeing regular access to sufficient food and water ... and also capable of addressing the primary needs and necessities ensuing from genuine food crises ...” I added, “The problem of food insecurity needs to be addressed within a long-term perspective, eliminating the structural causes that give rise to it and promoting the agricultural development of poorer countries. This can be done by investing in rural infrastructures, irrigation systems, transport, organization of markets, and in the development and dissemination of agricultural technology that can make the best use of the human, natural and socio-economic resources that are more readily available at the local level, while guaranteeing their sustainability over the long term as well” (no. 27). Hence the need to oppose those forms of aid that do grave damage to the agricultural sector, those approaches to food production that are geared solely towards consumption and lack a wider perspective, and especially greed, which causes speculation to rear its head even in the marketing of cereals, as if food were to be treated just like any other commodity.

3. The weakness of current mechanisms for food security and the need to re-examine them are confirmed, one might say, by the mere fact that this Summit has been convoked. Even though the poorest countries are more fully integrated into the world economy than in the past, movements in international markets make them more vulnerable and force them to seek the aid of intergovernmental institutions, which no doubt do valuable and indispensable work. The concept of *cooperation*, though, must be consistent with the principle of *subsidiarity*: it is necessary to involve “local communities in choices and decisions that affect the use of agricultural land” (*ibid.*). This is because integral human development requires responsible choices on the part of everyone and it demands an attitude of solidarity – meaning that aid or disaster relief should not be seen as opportunities to promote the interests of those who make resources available or of elite groups among the beneficiaries. With regard to countries that are in need of external support, the international community has the duty to assist with the instruments of cooperation, assuming collective responsibility for their development, “through the solidarity of ... presence, supervision, training and respect” (*ibid.*, 47). Within this overall context of *responsibility*, every country has the right to define its own economic model, taking steps to secure its freedom to choose its own objectives. In this way, cooperation must become an effective instrument, un beholden to interests that can absorb a not insignificant part of the resources destined for development. Moreover, it is important to emphasize that an attitude of solidarity regarding the development of poor countries also has the potential to contribute to a solution of the current global crisis. Support given to these nations through financial plans inspired by solidarity, enabling them to provide for their own requirements of consumption and development, not only favours their internal economic growth, but can have a positive impact on integral human development in other countries (cf. *ibid.*, 27).

4. In the current situation there is a continuing disparity in the level of development *within* and

*among* nations that leads to instability in many parts of the world, accentuating the contrast between poverty and wealth. This no longer applies only to models of development, but also to an increasingly widespread perception concerning food insecurity, namely the tendency to view hunger as structural, an integral part of the socio-political situation of the weakest countries, a matter of resigned regret, if not downright indifference. It is not so, and it must never be so! To fight and conquer hunger it is essential to start *redefining the concepts and principles that have hitherto governed international relations*, in such a way as to answer the question: what can direct the attention and the consequent conduct of States towards the needs of the poorest? The response must be sought not in the technical aspects of cooperation, but in the principles that lie behind it: only in the name of common membership of the worldwide human family can every people and therefore every country be asked to practise solidarity, that is, to shoulder the burden of concrete responsibilities in meeting the needs of others, so as to favour the genuine sharing of goods, founded on love.

5. Nevertheless, while it is true that *human solidarity inspired by love* goes beyond justice – because to love is to give, to offer what is “mine” to the other – it is never *without justice*, which leads us to give the other what is “his”, what belongs to him by virtue of his being and acting. Indeed, I cannot “give” the other what is “mine”, without first giving him what belongs to him in justice (cf. *ibid.*, 6). If the aim is to eliminate hunger, international action is needed not only to promote balanced and sustainable economic growth and political stability, but also to seek out new parameters – primarily *ethical* but also *juridical* and *economic* ones – capable of inspiring the degree of cooperation required to build a relationship of parity between countries at different stages of development. This, as well as closing the existing gap, could favour the capacity of each people to consider itself an active player, thereby confirming that the fundamental equality of all peoples is rooted in the common origin of the human family, the source of those principles of “natural law” that should inspire political, juridical and economic choices and approaches in international life (cf. *ibid.*, 59). Saint Paul speaks eloquently on this subject: “I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality. As it is written, ‘He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack’” (2 Cor 8:13-15).

6. Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, in order to combat hunger and promote integral human development, it is necessary to understand the needs of the rural world, and likewise to ensure that any decline in donor support does not create uncertainties in the financing of activities of cooperation: any tendency towards a short-sighted view of the rural world as a thing of secondary importance must be avoided. At the same time, access to international markets must be favoured for those products coming from the poorest areas, which today are often relegated to the margins. In order to achieve these objectives, it is necessary to separate the rules of *international trade* from the logic of profit viewed as an end in itself, directing them towards the support of economic initiative in countries with greater need of development; once they have greater income at their

disposal, these countries will be able to advance towards the self-sufficiency that leads to food security.

7. Nor must the fundamental rights of the individual be forgotten, which include, of course, *the right to sufficient, healthy and nutritious food, and likewise water*, these rights take on an important role in the realization of others, beginning with the primary one, the right to life. It is necessary, then, to cultivate “a public conscience that considers *food and access to water as universal rights of all human beings, without distinction or discrimination*” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 27). Much has been patiently accomplished in recent years by FAO in this regard: on the one hand it has favoured an enlargement of the objectives of this right over and above the mere guarantee of satisfying primary needs, and on the other it has emphasized the need for its adequate regulation.

8. Methods of food production likewise demand attentive analysis of the relationship between development and *protection of the environment*. The desire to possess and to exploit the resources of the planet in an excessive and disordered manner is the primary cause of all environmental degradation. Protection of the environment challenges the modern world to guarantee a harmonious form of development, respectful of the design of God the creator, and therefore capable of safeguarding the planet (cf. *ibid.*, 48-51). While the entire human race is called to acknowledge its obligations to future generations, it is also true that States and international organizations have a duty to protect the environment as a shared good. In this context, the links between environmental security and the disturbing phenomenon of climate change need to be explored further, focusing on the central importance of the human person, and especially of the populations most at risk from both phenomena. Norms, legislation, development plans and investments are not enough, however: what is needed is a change in the lifestyles of individuals and communities, in habits of consumption and in perceptions of what is genuinely needed. Most of all, there is a moral duty to distinguish between good and evil in human action, so as to rediscover the bond of communion that unites the human person and creation.

9. As I pointed out in the Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, it is important to remember that “the deterioration of nature is ... closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence: *when ‘human ecology’ is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits.*” Indeed, “the ecological system is based on respect for a plan that affects both the health of society and its good relationship with nature.” And “*the decisive issue is the overall moral tenor of society.*” Therefore, “our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other. Herein lies a grave contradiction in our mentality and practice today: one which demeans the person, disrupts the environment and damages society” (*ibid.*, 51).

10. Hunger is the most cruel and concrete sign of poverty. Opulence and waste are no longer acceptable when the tragedy of hunger is assuming ever greater proportions. Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Catholic Church will always be concerned for efforts to defeat hunger; the

Church is committed to support, by word and deed, the action taken in solidarity – planned, responsible and regulated – to which all members of the international community are called to contribute. The Church does not wish to interfere in political decisions: she respects the knowledge gained through scientific study, and decisions arrived at through reason responsibly enlightened by authentically human values, and she supports the effort to eliminate hunger. This is the most immediate and concrete sign of solidarity inspired by charity, and it brooks neither delay nor compromise. Such solidarity relies on technology, laws and institutions to meet the aspirations of individuals, communities and entire peoples, yet it must not exclude the religious dimension, with all the spiritual energy that it brings, and its promotion of the human person. Acknowledgment of the transcendental worth of every man and every woman is still the first step towards the conversion of heart that underpins the commitment to eradicate deprivation, hunger and poverty in all their forms.

I thank you for your gracious attention and, as I conclude, I offer greetings and good wishes in the official languages of FAO, to all the Member States of the Organization.

God bless your efforts to ensure that all people are given their daily bread.

Que Dieu bénisse vos efforts pour assurer le pain quotidien à chaque personne.

Dios bendiga sus esfuerzos para garantizar el pan de cada día para cada persona.

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Thank you.

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