



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 37th CONFERENCE OF FAO

Clementine Hall

Friday, 1st July 2011

*Mr President,
Mr Ministers,
Mr Director-General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am particularly glad to welcome you who are attending the 37th Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. You are perpetuating a long and happy tradition, inaugurated 60 years ago at the time the FAO was established in Rome.

Mr President, through you I would like to thank the many government delegations that have wished to be present at this meeting, thereby witnessing to the effective universality of the FAO. I would also like to renew the Holy See's support for the Organization's praiseworthy and indispensable work and to confirm that the Catholic Church is committed to collaborating with your endeavour to respond to the real needs of numerous brothers and sisters in humanity.

I take this opportunity to greet Mr Jacques Diouf, the Director-General who, with competence and devotion, has enabled the FAO to face the problems and crises brought about by the changing global situations which are affecting, even dramatically, its specific field of action.

I extend my most sincere good wishes to Mr José Graziano da Silva, recently elected Director-General, for the success of his future activity, while I express the hope that the FAO may respond increasingly and ever better to the expectations of the member States and contribute practical solutions for people suffering from hunger and malnutrition.

Your work has identified the policies and strategies that can contribute to the important revitalizing of the agricultural sector, the level of food production and the more general development of rural areas. The present crisis that is now affecting all aspects of the economic and social situation requires, in fact, that no effort be spared to eradicate poverty, the first step to save millions of men, women and children from starvation who have no daily bread.

However, a complete reflection requires a search into the causes of this situation that is not limited to levels of production, to the increasing demand for food or the fluctuation of prices: factors which, although important, risk causing the drama to be read exclusively in technical terms.

Poverty, underdevelopment and consequently hunger are often caused by selfish attitudes which, read in the human heart, emerge in the social activity of human beings, in their arising trade, in market conditions and in the lack of access to food, resulting in the denial of the primary right of every person to be nourished, hence free of hunger.

How can we gloss over the fact that food itself has become an object of speculation or indeed is linked to the development of a financial market which, with no set rules and practically no moral principles seems attached to the single goal of profit?

Adequate food concerns the fundamental right to life. To guarantee it also means intervening directly on those factors in the agricultural sector which negatively affect productivity on the mechanisms of distribution and on the international market. And all this when a global food production, according to FAO and authorized experts, is able to feed the world population.

The international framework and frequent anxiety engendered by instability and rising prices demands practical and necessarily unitary responses in order to obtain better results that States cannot guarantee individually. This means making solidarity an essential criterion for every political action and every strategy, so as to make international activity and its legislation as many instruments of effective service to the human family in its entirety, and, in particular, to the neediest people.

It is therefore urgently necessary to have a developmental model which does not only consider the economic importance of needs or the technical viability of the strategies to be pursued, but also the human dimension of all initiatives. It must also be capable of achieving authentic brotherhood (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 20), relying on the ethical recommendation of “giving food to the hungry” which is part of the sentiment of compassion and humanity engraved in every person’s heart and which the Church numbers among the works of mercy.

In this perspective, the institutions of the international community are called to work consistently, following their mandate in order to support the values proper to human dignity by eliminating closed attitudes and without leaving room for private concerns to be passed off as in the general

interest.

The FAO is also called to renew its structure, throwing off the obstacles that hinder the realization of the purpose stated in its Constitution: raising levels of nutrition, securing improvements in the efficiency of the production and distribution of all food and agricultural products and bettering the condition of rural populations so as to free humanity from hunger (cf. FAO, *Constitution*, Preamble).

To this end, full harmony of the Organization and Governments becomes essential in order to guide and support projects, especially in the present situation when available economic and financial resources are diminishing, while the number of hungry people in the world is not falling in accordance with the hoped-for goals.

I am thinking of the situation of millions of children who, as the principal victims of this tragedy, are condemned to a premature death and to a delay in their physical and psychological growth or who are forced into forms of exploitation to receive even a minimal quantity of food.

Attention to the young generations can be a way of countering the abandonment of rural zones and farm work, to permit entire communities whose survival is threatened by hunger to envisage their future with greater confidence.

We are, in fact, obliged to note that, in spite of the commitments made and the consequent obligations, help and concrete aid is frequently limited to emergencies, forgetting that a consistent conception of development must be able to outline a future for every person, family and community, favouring long terms goals.

Thus the chosen projects must also be supported by the international community as a whole, in order to rediscover the value of the rural family business and to support its central role in order to achieve stable food security. Indeed, in the rural world the traditional family nucleus is endeavouring to promote agricultural production through the wise transmission by parents to their children not only of systems of cultivation or of the preservation and distribution of food, but also of lifestyles, principles of education, culture, the religious sense, and the conception of the sacredness of the person in all the stages of his or her existence. The rural family is not only a work model, but a model of living and a concrete expression of solidarity, in which the essential role of women is confirmed.

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, the aim of food security is an authentically human requirement, as we are aware. To guarantee it to the present generations and to those that are to come also means protecting natural resources from frenzied exploitation, since the consumer race and consequent waste appear to pay no attention at all to the genetic patrimony and biological differences that are so important for agricultural activities. Moreover, the idea of an exclusive

appropriation of these resources is opposed to the call that God addresses to men and women, so that by tilling the earth and preserving it (cf. Gn 2:8-17) they may encourage participation in the use of the goods of Creation, an aim that international multilateral activity and legislation can certainly contribute to achieve.

In our era when, in addition to the numerous problems that besiege agricultural work there are new opportunities to contribute to resolving the drama of famine, you can and strive to ensure that by guaranteeing the food that corresponds to their needs, each and every one may develop in accordance with their true dimension as creatures made in the likeness of God.

This is the wish I would like to express, as I invoke upon you and upon your work an abundance of divine blessings.