

*Your Excellency*

*Mr Qu Dongyu*

*Director-General of FAO*

On the day that FAO is celebrating its 75th anniversary, I would like to salute you and all the members of FAO. Your mission is beautiful and important, because you are working with the aim of defeating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.

The theme of this year's World Food Day is significant: "Grow, nourish, sustain. Together. Our actions are our future". This theme highlights the need to act jointly and with the strong determination to be able to generate initiatives that will improve our environment and encourage the hopes of many people and many communities.

Over these 75 years, FAO has learned that it is not sufficient to produce food, but that it is also important to ensure that food systems are sustainable and provide healthy, affordable diets for all. The aim is to adopt innovative solutions that can transform the way in which we produce and consume food for the well-being of our communities and our planet, thus strengthening the capacity for resilience and sustainability in the long term.

It is therefore even more important, during this particularly difficult period caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, to support the initiatives implemented by organizations such as FAO, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) with a view to encouraging sustainable, diversified agriculture, supporting small farming communities and cooperating for the rural development of the poorest countries.

We recognize that we need to meet this challenge at a time that is full of contradictions: on the one hand, we are witnessing unprecedented progress in various scientific fields; while on the other, the world is facing multiple humanitarian crises. Regrettably, we have seen that, according to the latest FAO statistics, despite the efforts made in recent decades, the number of people fighting hunger and food insecurity has grown and is still growing, and the current pandemic will increase these figures still further.

Hunger is not merely a disaster for humanity but also a disgrace, caused largely by the unequal distribution of the fruits of the earth, compounded by a lack of investment in the agricultural sector, the consequences of climate change and the increase in conflicts in various parts of the planet. What is more, tonnes of food is wasted. Faced with this reality, we cannot fail to respond or to act. We are all responsible.

The current crisis shows us that specific policies and actions are needed to eliminate hunger from the world.

Dialectical or ideological discussions can sometimes divert us from this objective and we allow our brothers and sisters to continue to die from lack of food. A courageous decision would be to use the money spent on arms and other military expenditure to set up "a World Fund" to defeat hunger permanently and to help the poorest countries. This would prevent many wars and the displacement of so many of our brothers and their families who are forced to abandon their homes and their countries in search of a better life (cf. *Fratelli tutti*, nos. 189, 262).

Mr Director-General: In expressing my desire that the work of FAO be ever keener and more productive, may God grant his blessing on you and all those cooperating in this essential mission to cultivate the land, feed the hungry and safeguard natural resources, so that we can all live in dignity, with respect and with love. Many thanks.