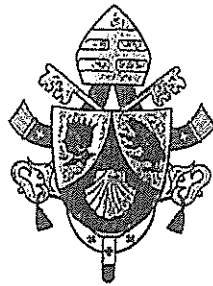


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To Mr JACQUES DIOUF
Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations (FAO)

1. The annual celebration of World Food Day is an occasion to draw up a balance-sheet of all that has been achieved through the commitment of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to guarantee daily food for millions of our brothers and sisters throughout the world. It also provides a suitable occasion to note the difficulties that are encountered when the necessary attitudes of solidarity are lacking.

Too often, attention is diverted from the needs of populations, insufficient emphasis is placed on work in the fields, and the goods of the earth are not given adequate protection. As a result, economic imbalance is produced, and the inalienable rights and dignity of every human person are ignored.

The theme of this year's World Food Day, *United against Hunger*, is a timely reminder that everyone needs to make a commitment to give the agricultural sector its proper importance. Everyone – from individuals to the organizations of civil society, States and international institutions – needs to give priority to one of the most urgent goals for the human family: freedom from hunger. In order to achieve freedom from hunger it is necessary to ensure not only that enough food is available, but also that everyone has daily access to it: this means promoting whatever resources and infrastructures are necessary in order to sustain production and distribution on a scale sufficient to guarantee fully the right to food.

The efforts to achieve this goal will surely help to build up the unity of the human family throughout the world. Concrete initiatives are

needed, informed by charity, and inspired by truth – initiatives that are capable of overcoming natural obstacles linked to the cycles of the seasons or to environmental conditions, as well as man-made obstacles. Charity, practised in the light of truth, can bring an end to divisions and conflicts so as to allow the goods of the earth to pass between peoples in a lively and continuous exchange.

An important step forward was the international community's recent decision to protect the right to water which, as FAO has always maintained, is essential to human nutrition, to rural activities and to the conservation of nature. Indeed, as my venerable predecessor Pope John Paul II observed in his Message for the 2002 World Food Day, many different religions and cultures recognize a symbolic value in water, from which there "springs an invitation to be fully aware of the importance of this precious commodity, and consequently to revise present patterns of behaviour in order to guarantee, today and in the future, that all people shall have access to the water indispensable for their needs, and that productive activities, and agriculture in particular, shall enjoy adequate levels of this priceless resource" (*Message for the 2002 World Food Day*, 13 October 2002).

2. If the international community is to be truly "united" against hunger, then poverty must be overcome through *authentic human development*, based on the idea of the person as a unity of body, soul and spirit. Today, though, there is a tendency to limit the vision of development to one that satisfies the material needs of the person, especially through access to technology; yet authentic development is not simply a function of what a person "has", it must also embrace higher values of fraternity, solidarity and the common good.

Amid the pressures of globalization, under the influence of interests that often remain fragmented, it is wise to propose a model of development built on *fraternity*: if it is inspired by solidarity and directed towards the common good, it will be able to provide correctives to the current global crisis. In order to sustain levels of food security in the short term, adequate funding must be provided so as to make it possible for agriculture to reactivate production cycles, despite the deterioration of climatic and environmental conditions. These conditions, it must be said, have a markedly negative impact on rural populations, crop systems and working patterns, especially in countries that are already afflicted with food shortages. Developed countries have to be aware that the world's growing needs require consistent levels of aid from them. They cannot simply remain closed towards others: such an attitude would not help to resolve the crisis.

In this context, FAO has the essential task of examining the issue of world hunger at the institutional level and proposing particular initiatives that involve its member States in responding to the growing demand for food. Indeed, the nations of the world are called to give and to receive in proportion to their effective needs, by reason of that "*pressing moral need for renewed solidarity*, especially in relationships between developing countries and those that are highly industrialized" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 49).

3. The recent worthy campaign "*1 Billion Hungry*", by which FAO seeks to raise awareness of the urgency of the fight against hunger, has highlighted the need for an adequate response both from individual countries and from the international community, even when the response is limited to assistance or emergency aid. This is why a reform of international institutions according to the principle of subsidiarity is essential, since "institutions by themselves are not enough, because

integral human development is primarily a vocation, and therefore it involves a free assumption of responsibility in solidarity on the part of everyone" (*ibid.*, 11).

In order to eliminate hunger and malnutrition, obstacles of self-interest must be overcome so as to make room for a fruitful *gratuitousness*, manifested in international cooperation as an expression of genuine fraternity. This does not obviate the need for justice, though, and it is important that existing rules be respected and implemented, in addition to whatever plans for intervention and programmes of action may prove necessary. Individuals, peoples and countries must be allowed to shape their own development, taking advantage of external assistance in accordance with priorities and concepts rooted in their traditional techniques, in their culture, in their religious patrimony and in the wisdom passed on from generation to generation within the family.

Invoking the blessing of the Almighty upon the activities of FAO, I wish to assure you, Mr Director General, that the Church is always ready to work for the defeat of hunger. Indeed, she is constantly at work, through her own structures, to alleviate the poverty and deprivation afflicting large parts of the world's population, and she is fully conscious that her own engagement in this field forms part of a common international effort to promote unity and peace among the community of peoples.

From the Vatican, 15 October 2010

Benedictus XVI