



The Holy See

***MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MR JACQUES DIOUF, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF FAO
ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD FOOD DAY 2011***

*To Mr Jacques Diouf,
Director-General of the FAO*

While the annual celebration of World Food Day wishes to commemorate the foundation of the FAO and its commitment to agricultural development to combat hunger and malnutrition, it is also an opportunity to emphasize the plight of so many of our brothers and sisters who lack daily bread.

The painful images of the numerous victims of hunger in the Horn of Africa impress us, as every day another chapter is added to what is one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes in recent decades. Immediate aid is of course essential in the face of the death from starvation of entire communities obliged to abandon the land of their origins, but it is also necessary to intervene in the medium- and long-term so that international intervention is not limited to responding only to emergencies.

The situation is increasingly complicated by the difficult crisis that is affecting different sectors of the economy world wide and is hitting the most deprived, besides conditioning agricultural production and the consequent possibility of access to foodstuffs. Nevertheless, the effort of the Governments and of the other members of the international community must be oriented to efficient coordination, aware that liberation from the yoke of hunger is the first concrete expression of the right to life which, in spite of being solemnly proclaimed, is often very far from being effectively put into practice.

The theme chosen for this Day “Food Prices: from Crisis to Stability” rightly invites us to reflect on the importance of the different factors that can provide individuals and the community with essential resources, starting with farming that must not be seen as a secondary activity but as the focus of every strategy of growth and integral development. This is even more important if we take

into account that the availability of food is increasingly conditioned by the fluctuation of prices and sudden climate changes. At the same time we are seeing a steady abandonment of rural areas with a global decrease in agricultural production and therefore of food reserves. In addition, it seems, unfortunately, that here and there the idea of considering foodstuffs as any commercial product is spreading and therefore also subjected to speculation.

The fact cannot be glossed over that despite the progress achieved to date and the promise of an economy that increasingly respects every person's dignity, the future of the human family needs a new impetus if it is to overcome the current fragile and uncertain situation. Although we are living in a global dimension there are evident signs of the deep division between those who lack daily sustenance and those who have huge resources at their disposal, who frequently do not use them for nutritional purposes or even destroy reserves. This confirms that globalization makes us feel closer but does not establish fraternity (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 19). This is why it is necessary to rediscover those values engraved on the heart of every person that have always inspired their action: the sentiment of compassion and of humanity for others, the duty of solidarity and the commitment to justice must return to being the basis of all action, including what is done by the international community.

In the face of the widespread drama of hunger, the invitation to reflection, the analysis of problems and even the readiness to intervene are not enough. All too often these factors remain unexpressed, because they pertain to the emotional sphere and fail to jog the conscience and its quest for truth and goodness. There are frequent intentions to justify the conduct and omissions dictated by selfishness and by vested interests. On the contrary this Day aims to be a commitment to modify forms of conduct and decisions that ensure, today rather than tomorrow, that every person have access to the necessary food resources and that the farming sector have a sufficient level of investments and resources that are able to stabilize production, and hence the market. It is easy to reduce any consideration of the need for food to the growth of a population, knowing well that the causes of hunger have other roots and that they have taken a heavy toll on life among many a poor Lazarus who is not allowed to sit at table with the rich Epulo (cf. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, n. 47).

In fact it is a question of adopting an inner attitude of responsibility, able to inspire a different life style, with the necessary modest behaviour and consumption, in order thereby: to promote the good of future generations in sustainable terms; the safeguard of the goods of creation; the distribution of resources and above all, the concrete commitment to the development of entire peoples and nations. On their part, the beneficiaries of international cooperation are conscientiously to employ solidarity funds "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" (*Caritas in Veritate*, n. 27).

It will be possible to put all this into practice if the international institutions also guarantee their service with impartiality and efficiency, but fully respecting the deepest convictions of the human spirit and every person's aspirations. In this perspective the FAO can contribute to guaranteeing adequate nutrition for all, to improving the methods of cultivation and of trade and to protecting the fundamental rights of those who work the land, without forgetting the most authentic values which the rural world and those who live in it preserve.

The Catholic Church feels close to the Institutions that are committed to guaranteeing food. Through her structures and development agencies, she will continue to accompany them actively in this effort to ensure that every people and community has the necessary food security and that no compromise or negotiations, however authoritative, can guarantee, without real solidarity and authentic brotherhood. "The importance of this goal is such as to demand our openness to understand it in depth and to mobilize ourselves at the level of the 'heart', so as to ensure that current economic and social processes evolve towards fully human outcomes" (*Caritas in Veritate*, n. 20).

With these sentiments, Mr Director-General, I hope that you will pursue your commitment to the neediest people which has characterized these years of responsibility and dedication, while I invoke abundant blessings of the Almighty upon the FAO, upon each one of the Member States and upon the whole staff.

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