



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE THIRTY-FOURTH CONFERENCE
OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION***

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 22 November 2007*

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

As you gather for the Thirty-fourth Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican. Our meeting today is part of a tradition reaching back to the time when your Organization first set up its headquarters in Rome. I am happy to have yet another occasion to express appreciation for your work to eliminate the scourge of global hunger.

As you know, the Holy See has always maintained a keen interest in every effort made to rid the human family of famine and malnutrition, in the awareness that resolving these problems requires not only extraordinary dedication and highly refined technical training, but above all a genuine spirit of cooperation uniting all men and women of good will.

This noble goal calls for unwavering acknowledgement of the inherent dignity of the human person at every stage of life. All forms of discrimination, and particularly those that thwart agricultural development, must be rejected since they constitute a violation of the basic right of every person to be “free from hunger”. These convictions are in fact demanded by the very nature of your work on behalf of the common good of humanity, as expressed so eloquently by your motto - *fiat panis* - words that are also at the heart of the Gospel which the Church is called to proclaim.

The data gathered through your research and the extent of your programmes for supporting the

global endeavour to develop the world's natural resources clearly testify to one of the most troubling paradoxes of our time: the relentless spread of poverty in a world that is also experiencing unprecedented prosperity, not only in the economic sphere but also in the rapidly developing fields of science and technology.

The obstacles standing in the way of overcoming this tragic situation can at times be discouraging. Armed conflicts, outbreaks of disease, adverse atmospheric and environmental conditions and the massive forced displacement of peoples: all these obstacles should serve as a motivation to redouble our efforts to provide each person with his or her daily bread. For her part, the Church is convinced that the quest for more effective technical solutions in an ever-changing and expanding world calls for far-sighted programmes embodying enduring values grounded in the inalienable dignity and rights of the human person.

FAO continues to play an essential role in relieving world hunger, while reminding the international community of the pressing need constantly to update methods and to design strategies adequate to today's challenges. I express my appreciation for the generous efforts made in this regard by all associated with your Organization. The Holy See has closely followed the activities of FAO over the last sixty years and is confident that the significant results already achieved will continue. FAO was one of the first international organizations with which the Holy See established regular diplomatic relations. On 23 November 1948, during the Fourth Session of your Conference, the Holy See was granted the unique status of "Permanent Observer", thus ensuring its right to participate in the activities of FAO's various departments and affiliated agencies in a way consonant with the Church's religious and moral mission.

The united effort of the international community to eliminate malnutrition and promote genuine development necessarily calls for clear structures of management and oversight, and a realistic assessment of the resources needed to address a wide range of different situations. It requires the contribution of every member of society - individuals, volunteer organizations, businesses, and local and national governments - always with due regard for those ethical and moral principles which are the common patrimony of all people and the foundation of all social life. The international community must always avail itself of this precious treasure of common values since genuine and lasting development can only be furthered in a spirit of cooperation and a willingness to share professional and technical resources.

Indeed, today more than ever, the human family needs to find the tools and strategies capable of overcoming the conflicts caused by social differences, ethnic rivalries, and the gross disparity in levels of economic development. Mankind is thirsting for true and lasting peace - a peace that can only come about if individuals, groups at every level, and government leaders cultivate habits of responsible decision-making rooted firmly in the fundamental principles of justice. It is therefore essential that societies dedicate their energies to educating authentic peacemakers: this is a task which falls in a particular way to organizations like your own, which cannot fail to recognize as the

foundation of authentic justice the universal destination of the goods of creation.

Religion, as a potent spiritual force for healing the wounds of conflict and division, has its own distinctive contribution to make in this regard, especially through the work of forming minds and hearts in accordance with a vision of the human person.

Ladies and Gentlemen, technical progress, important as it is, is not everything. Such progress must be placed within the wider context of the integral good of the human person. It must constantly draw nourishment from the common patrimony of values which can inspire concrete initiatives aimed at a more equitable distribution of spiritual and material goods. As I wrote in my encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, “those who are in a position to help others will realize that, in doing so, they themselves receive help; being able to help others is no merit or achievement of their own” (No. 35). This principle has a special application to the world of agriculture, in which the work of those who are often considered the “lowliest” members of society should be duly acknowledged and esteemed.

FAO’s outstanding activity on behalf of development and food security clearly points to the correlation between the spread of poverty and the denial of basic human rights, beginning with the fundamental right to adequate nutrition. Peace, prosperity, and respect for human rights are inseparably linked. The time has come to ensure, for the sake of peace, that no man, woman and child will ever be hungry again!

Dear friends, in renewing my esteem for your work, I assure you of my prayers that Almighty God will enlighten and guide your deliberations, so that the activity of FAO will respond ever more fully to the human family’s yearning for solidarity, justice and peace.

*AAS 99 (2007), p.1057-1060.

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