



The Holy See

***MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE 31st CONFERENCE
OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION****

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cordially greet you on the occasion of the 31st Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations that is taking place these days in Rome.

Your meeting comes between the "World Food Summit", which was held in 1996, and the "World Food Summit Five Years Later", to be held next year in June. For my part, I fervently hope that the work of this conference will help strengthen the noble intentions expressed in 1996, so that despite the difficult international situation the world can learn, next year, that real progress has been achieved in the absolutely vital field of nourishment.

The first pages of the Bible describe the luxuriant abundance of the created world and say that God has given to the human person everything he needs to lead a life worthy of a creature made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gn 1,26). Thus it should not be possible to find millions of people in the world who are undernourished or starving. The earth can provide for what they need, so the cause of this lack of food must be sought elsewhere. In the Book of Genesis, God entrusts creation to human hands (cf. Gn 1,26; 28) and we must look in this direction if we want to understand the current disorders. An equitable management of the goods of creation has been lacking, with an obvious inequality in sharing resources. In this perspective, your conference desires to be a sign of hope for the world, to show that there are some who are determined to practise responsible and creative management, aiming to guarantee "food security" to every member of the human family.

Their determination is based on the recognition of the fact that every human being enjoys the inviolable right to a proper diet, and that it is consequently the duty of all men and women, especially those in responsible positions, to ensure that this right is respected. We should not only

apply this principle to individuals but also to nations. When people can no longer satisfy their basic needs because of war, poverty, bad government or mismanagement, or even on account of natural disasters, others have the moral duty to intervene to help them.

The elimination of hunger in the world implies the will not only to debate or deplore this situation, but also to take the necessary practical steps to deal effectively and permanently with this problem.

Among the initiatives that I would especially like to encourage there is the decision made by the richest nations to devote part of their gross domestic product to the development of the poorest countries, and to do their utmost to reduce the burden of their foreign debt. They must persevere with these efforts even when urgent needs, national or international, might induce them to abandon them.

After the appalling events of 11 September, there have been great discussions about justice and the urgent need to correct injustices. In a religious perspective, injustice is the radical imbalance where man rises up against God and against his brethren in such a way that disorder reigns in human relations. Justice, on the contrary, is the perfect harmony between God, man and the world, which the Bible describes as paradise. Many of the world's injustices transform the earth into a desert: the most disturbing of them all is the hunger that millions of people suffer, with its inevitable repercussions on the problems of peace among nations. Didn't Pope Paul VI declare in 1967 that development is the new name for peace (cf. *Popolorum progressio*, nn. 76-77)? His words have proved even truer since then. Development involves many aspects but the most important one is the decision to guarantee every man, woman and child access to the food they need. This is why your conference does not only target "food security" but also "world peace", at a time when these values are seriously threatened.

Given your important responsibilities and the great hopes that are open before you, how could I fail to be with you in prayer? In these days I assure you of my closeness, as I implore Almighty God for an abundance of his blessings on the work of your conference, so that the FAO may continue to spread on earth the peace and justice that come from on high.

From the Vatican, 3 November 2001.

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