



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE WORLD FOOD SUMMIT
SPONSORED BY FAO (ROME, 10 - 13 JUNE 2002)***

*Mr President of the Italian Republic
and Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Mr Secretary-General of the United Nations
and Mr Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization,
Ladies and Gentlemen!*

I am pleased to extend respectful and cordial greetings to each one of you, Representatives of almost every county in the world, gathered in Rome, a little more than five years after the 1996 World Food Summit.

Since I am unable to be among you personally on this solemn occasion, I have asked Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State, to convey all my esteem and regard for the arduous work that you have to undertake in order to ensure that everyone has their daily bread.

I offer a special greeting to the President of the Italian Republic, and to all the Heads of State and Government who have come to Rome for this Summit. During my Pastoral Visits to various parts of the world, as well as at the Vatican, I have already had an opportunity to meet many of them personally: to all go my deferential best wishes for themselves and the Nations they represent.

I extend this greeting to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as well as to the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization and to the Heads of other International Organizations present at this meeting. The Holy See expects much from their efforts on behalf of humanity's material and spiritual progress.

I express the hope that the present World Food Summit will be crowned with success: this is what millions of men and women throughout the world expect.

The last Summit in 1996 had already established that hunger and malnutrition are not phenomena of a merely natural or structural nature, affecting only certain geographic areas, but are to be seen as the consequence of a more complex situation of underdevelopment resulting from human inertia and self-centeredness.

If the goals of the 1996 Summit have not been met, that can be attributed also to the absence of a culture of solidarity, and to international relations often shaped by a pragmatism devoid of ethical and moral foundations. Moreover, a cause for concern is to be found in the statistics according to which assistance given to poor countries in recent years appears to have decreased rather than increased.

Today more than ever there is an urgent need in international relationships for solidarity to become the criterion underlying all forms of cooperation, with the acknowledgment that the resources which God the Creator has entrusted to us are destined for all.

Of course, much is expected from the experts, whose task it is to point out when and how to increase agricultural resources, how to achieve better distribution of products, how to set up food security programmes, how to devise new techniques to boost harvests and increase herds.

The Preamble to the *FAO Constitution* itself proclaimed the commitment of each country to raise its level of nutrition and improve the conditions of its agriculture and of its rural population, in such a way as to increase production and secure an effective distribution of food supplies in all parts of the world.

These goals, however, involve a constant reconsideration of the relationship between the right to be freed from poverty and the duty of the whole human family to provide practical help to the needy.

For my part, I am pleased that the present World Food Summit is once more urging the various sectors of the international community, Governments and Intergovernmental Institutions, to make a commitment to somehow guaranteeing the right to nutrition in cases where an individual State is unable to do so because of its own underdevelopment and poverty. Such a commitment can be seen as entirely necessary and legitimate, given the fact that poverty and hunger risk compromising even the ordered coexistence of peoples and nations, and constitute a real threat to peace and international security.

Hence the importance of the present World Food Summit, with its reaffirmation of the concept of food security and its call for a mobilization of solidarity aimed at reducing by half, by the year 2015, the number of people in the world who are undernourished and deprived of the bare necessities of life. This is an enormous challenge, and one to which the Church too is fully committed.

The Catholic Church is ever concerned for the promotion of human rights and the integral development of peoples, and will therefore continue to support all who work to ensure that every member of the human family receives adequate daily food. Her intimate vocation is to be close to the world's poor, and she hopes that everyone will become practically involved in speedily resolving this problem, one of the gravest facing the human family.

May the Almighty who is rich in mercy send his blessing upon each one of you, upon the work you do under the aegis of FAO, and upon all those who strive for the authentic progress of the human family.

From the Vatican, 10 June 2002

IOANNES PAULUS II

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n.24 pp.1, 6.*

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