



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE DIRECTOR GENERAL
OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO)
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF WORLD FOOD DAY***

*To Mr Jacques Diouf
Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations (FAO)*

The annual celebration of World Food Day, sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), is an opportunity to review the numerous activities of this Organization, specifically with regard to its twofold aim: to provide adequate nutrition for our brothers and sisters throughout the world and to consider the obstacles to this work caused by difficult situations and attitudes contrary to solidarity.

This year's chosen theme - *Investing in agriculture for food security* - focuses our attention on the agricultural sector and invites us to reflect on the various factors that hinder the fight against hunger, many of them man-made. Not enough attention is given to the needs of agriculture, and this both upsets the natural order of creation and compromises respect for human dignity.

In Christian tradition, agricultural labour takes on a deeper meaning, both because of the effort and hardship that it involves and also because it offers a privileged experience of God's presence and his love for his creatures. Christ himself uses agricultural images to speak of the Kingdom, thereby showing a great respect for this form of labour.

Today, we think especially of those who have had to abandon their farmlands because of conflicts, natural disasters and because of society's neglect of the agricultural sector. The "promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply" (Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, 28).

It is now ten years since my venerable predecessor, Pope John Paul II, inaugurated the *World Food Summit*. This gives us an opportunity to look back and take stock of the inadequate attention given to the agricultural sector and the effects this has on rural communities. Solidarity is the key to identifying and eliminating the causes of poverty and underdevelopment.

Very often, international action to combat hunger ignores the *human factor*, and priority is given instead to technical and socio-economic aspects. Local communities need to be involved in choices and decisions concerning land use, since farmland is being diverted increasingly to other purposes, often with damaging effects on the environment and the long-term viability of the land. If the human person is treated as the protagonist, it becomes clear that short-term economic gains must be placed within the context of better long-term planning for food security, with regard to both quantity and quality.

The order of creation demands that priority be given to those human activities that do not cause irreversible damage to nature, but which instead are woven into the social, cultural and religious fabric of the different communities. In this way, a sober balance is achieved between consumption and the sustainability of resources.

The *rural family* needs to regain its rightful place at the heart of the social order. The moral principles and values which govern it belong to the heritage of humanity, and must take priority over legislation. They are concerned with individual conduct, relations between husband and wife and between generations, and the sense of family solidarity. Investment in the agricultural sector has to allow the family to assume its proper place and function, avoiding the damaging consequences of hedonism and materialism that can place marriage and family life at risk.

Education and formation programmes in rural areas need to be broadly based, adequately resourced and aimed at all age groups. Special attention should be given to the most vulnerable, especially women and the young. It is important to hand on to future generations not merely the technical aspects of production, nutrition and protection of natural resources, but the values of the rural world.

In faithfully carrying out its mandate, the FAO makes a vital investment in agriculture, not only through adequate technical and specialized support, but also by broadening the dialogue that takes place among the national and international agencies involved in rural development. Individual initiatives should be incorporated within larger strategies aimed at combating poverty and hunger. This can be of decisive importance if the nations and communities involved are to implement consistent programmes and work towards a common goal.

Today more than ever, in the face of recurring crises and the pursuit of narrow self-interest, there has to be cooperation and solidarity between states, each of which should be attentive to the needs of its weakest citizens, who are the first to suffer from poverty. Without this solidarity, there

is a risk of limiting or even impeding the work of international organizations that set out to fight hunger and malnutrition. In this way, they build up effectively the spirit of justice, harmony and peace among peoples: "*opus iustitiae pax*" (cf. *Is 32:17*).

With these thoughts, Director General, I wish to invoke the Lord's blessing upon FAO, its Member States, and upon all those who work so hard to support the agricultural sector and to promote rural development.

From the Vatican, 16 October 2006.

BENEDICT XVI

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