



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MR JACQUES DIOUF, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF FAO
ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD FOOD DAY 2007**

*The Distinguished Mr Jacques Diouf
Director General of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization*

1. This year the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which you direct, invites the international community, remembering once again its foundation, to tackle one of the gravest challenges of our time: freeing millions of human beings from hunger, whose lives are in danger due to a lack of daily bread.

The theme chosen for this Day: "*The right to food*", fittingly opens the reflections that the international community is preparing to make on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This coincidence helps us to recall the importance that the right to food has for the realization of other rights, beginning above all with the fundamental right to life.

We must observe that the endeavours made until now have not significantly diminished the numbers of those suffering from hunger in the world, even though all know that food is a primary right. This is perhaps due to the fact that one tends to be solely and principally motivated by technical and economic considerations, forgetting the primary, ethical dimension of "feeding the hungry".

This priority concerns the sentiments of compassion and solidarity proper to the human being, which includes sharing with others not only material goods, but also the love which all need. In effect, we give too little if we offer only material things.

2. The available data show that the nonfulfillment of the right to food is not only due to natural causes, but also and above all, to situations provoked by the conduct of men and women that lead to a general deterioration of social, economic and human standards.

Increasingly, there are always more people who, because of poverty and bloody conflicts, feel obligated to leave their own home and loved ones in order to search for support outside their own country. In spite of international pledges, many of these people are refused.

Among the mature members of the Community of Nations, however, a strong awareness is needed that considers food as a universal right of all human beings, without distinction or discrimination.

3. The objective of eradicating hunger and at the same time of being able to provide healthy and sufficient food also demands specific methods and actions that mean a wise use of resources that respect Creation's patrimony.

The result of working in this direction will benefit not only science, research and technology, but also take into account the cycles and rhythm of nature known to the inhabitants of rural areas, thus protecting the traditional customs of the indigenous communities, leaving aside egotistical and exclusively economic motivations.

The right to food, with all that this implies, has an immediate repercussion on both the individual and communal dimensions, which bring together entire peoples and human groups. I am thinking in a special way of the situation of children - the main victims of this tragedy -, who at times are obstacles to their physical and psychological development and in many instances are forced to work or are enlisted in armed groups in exchange for a little food.

In such cases, I place my hope in the initiatives that have been proposed on many levels in favour of school food programmes and which permit the entire community, whose survival is threatened by hunger, to look with great hope to the future.

A common and concrete commitment is therefore urgently needed in which all members of society, both in the individual as well as the international spheres, feel duty-bound to work together in order to actualize the right to food, for failure to do so constitutes a clear violation of human dignity and of the rights which derive from it.

4. Knowledge of the problems of the agricultural world and of a lack of food, demonstrated by a capacity to propose plans and programmes to find solutions, is a fundamental merit of the FAO and testifies to the acute sensibility for the aspirations of those conditions put forward for a more human life.

At this time when there are so many similar problems, it would also be well to find new initiatives that can contribute to alleviating the drama of hunger, and I encourage you to continue to work so that food may be guaranteed that responds to actual needs, and in such a way, that every person, created in the image of God, may grow conformed to his true human dimension.

The Catholic Church feels close to you in this endeavour and, throughout your diverse institutions, desires to continue to collaborate in order to sustain the aspirations and hopes of those persons and those peoples for which the work of the FAO is directed.

These are, Mr Director General, some reflections that I wish to bring to the attention of those who, with different responsibilities, work to offer the human family a future free of the drama of hunger, and at the same time, I invoke upon you and your work the constant Blessing of the Most High.

From the Vatican, 4 October 2007

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