



The Holy See

VISIT TO FAO ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
NUTRITION

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Thursday, 20 November 2014

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ADDRESS TO THE PLENARY OF THE CONFERENCE

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased and honoured to speak here today, at this Second International Conference on Nutrition. I wish to thank you, Mr President, for your warm greeting and words of welcome. I cordially greet the Director General of the FAO, Professor José Graziano da Silva, and the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr Margaret Chan, and I rejoice in their decision to convene to this conference the representatives of States, international institutions, and organizations of civil society, the world of agriculture and the private sector, with the aim of studying together the forms of intervention necessary to assure food security, as well as to insist on the changes that must be made to existing strategies. The concerted unity of purpose and of action, but above all the spirit of brotherhood, can be decisive in finding appropriate solutions. The Church, as you know, always seeks to be attentive and watchful regarding the spiritual and material welfare of people, especially those who are marginalized or excluded, in order to guarantee their safety and dignity.

1. The future of all nations is interconnected, more than ever before; they are like the members of one family who depend upon each other. However, we live in an era in which relations between nations are all too often damaged by mutual suspicion, which at times turns into forms of military and economic aggression, undermining friendship between brothers and rejecting or emarginating those who are already excluded. Those who lack their daily bread or decent employment are well aware of this. This is a picture of today's world, in which it is necessary to recognize the limits of

approaches based on the sovereignty of each State, understood as absolute, and on national interests, frequently conditioned by small power groups. This is well demonstrated by your working agenda for developing new standards, structures and greater commitments to feed the world. In this perspective, I hope that, in the formulation of these commitments, States may be inspired by the conviction that the right to nutrition can be guaranteed only if we care about the actual subject, that is, the person who suffers the effects of hunger and malnutrition: the true subject!

Nowadays there is much talk of rights, frequently neglecting duties; perhaps we have paid too little heed to those who are hungry. It is also painful to see that the fight against hunger and malnutrition is hindered by “market priorities”, the “primacy of profit”, which have reduced foodstuffs to a commodity like any other, subject to speculation, also of a financial nature. And while we speak of new rights, the hungry are waiting, at the street corner, asking for the right to citizenship, asking for due consideration of their status, to receive a healthy, basic diet. They ask for dignity, not for alms.

2. These criteria cannot remain in the limbo of theory. Individuals and peoples ask that justice be put into practice: not only in the legal sense, but also in terms of contribution and distribution. Therefore, development plans and the work of international organizations must take into consideration the wish, so frequent among ordinary people, for respect for fundamental human rights in all circumstances and, in this case, the rights of the hungry person. When this is achieved, then humanitarian intervention, emergency relief and development operations — in their truest, fullest sense — will attain greater momentum and yield the desired results.

3. Interest in the production, availability and accessibility of foodstuffs, in climate change and in agricultural trade should certainly inspire rules and technical measures, but the first concern must be the individual person, who lacks daily nourishment, who has given up thinking about life, family and social relationships, and instead fights only for survival. At the inauguration of the First Conference on Nutrition in this hall in 1992, St Pope John Paul II warned the international community of the risk of the “paradox of abundance”, in which there is food for everyone, but not everyone can eat, while waste, excessive consumption and the use of food for other purposes is visible before our very eyes. This is the paradox! Unfortunately, this “paradox” persists. There are few subjects about which there are as many fallacies as there are about hunger; few topics are as likely to be manipulated by data, statistics, by national security demands, corruption, or by grim references to the economic crisis. This is the first challenge that must be overcome.

The second challenge that must be addressed is the lack of solidarity; subconsciously we suspect that this word should be removed from the dictionary. Our societies are characterized by growing individualism and division: this ends up depriving the weakest of a decent life, and provokes revolts against institutions. When there is a lack of solidarity in a country, the effects are felt by all. Indeed, solidarity is the attitude that enables people to reach out to others and establish mutual relations on this sense of brotherhood that overcomes differences and limits, and inspires us to

seek the common good together. Human beings, as they become aware of being partly responsible for the plan of Creation, become capable of mutual respect, instead of fighting among themselves, damaging and impoverishing the planet. States, too, understood as communities of individuals and peoples, are called to act concertedly, to be willing to help each other through the principles and norms offered by international law. An inexhaustible source of inspiration, natural law, is inscribed in the human heart, and speaks to everyone in understandable terms: love, justice, peace, elements that are inseparable from each other. Like people, States and international institutions are called to welcome and nurture these values in a spirit of dialogue and mutual listening. In this way, the aim of feeding the human family becomes feasible.

4. Every woman, man, child and elderly person everywhere should be able to count on these guarantees. It is the duty of every State that cares for the well-being of its citizens to subscribe to them unreservedly, and to take the necessary steps to ensure their implementation. This requires perseverance and support. The Catholic Church also offers her contribution in this field through constant attention to the life of the poor, of the needy in all parts of the world; along the same lines, the Holy See is actively involved in international organizations and through numerous documents and statements. In this way, it contributes to identifying and adopting the criteria to be met in order to develop an equitable international system. These are criteria that, on the ethical plane, are based on the pillars of truth, freedom, justice and solidarity; at the same time, in the legal field, these same criteria include: the relationship between the right to nutrition, and the right to life and to a dignified existence; the right to be protected by law, however, is not always close to the reality of those who suffer from hunger; and the moral obligation to share the world's economic wealth. If we believe in the principle of the unity of the human family, based on the common paternity of God the Creator, and on the fraternity of human beings, no form of political or economic pressure which exploits the availability of foodstuffs can be considered acceptable. Political and economic pressure: here I am thinking about our sister and mother Earth, our planet, and about whether we are free from political and economic pressure and able to protect her, to prevent her from self-destruction. We have two conferences ahead of us, in Peru and France, that challenge us to Protect the Planet. I remember a phrase that I heard from an elderly man many years ago: "God always forgives offences and abuses; God always forgives. Men forgive at times; but the Earth never forgives!". Protect our Sister Earth, our Mother Earth, so that she does not react with destruction. But, above all, no system of discrimination, *de facto* or *de jure*, linked to the ability to access the market of foodstuffs, must be taken as a model for international actions that aim to eliminate hunger.

By sharing these reflections with you, I ask that the Almighty, God rich in mercy, bless all those who, with different responsibilities, place themselves at the service of those who suffer from hunger and know how to assist them with concrete gestures of closeness. I also pray that the international community might hear the appeal of this Conference and consider it an expression of the common conscience of humanity: to feed the hungry, in order to save life on the planet. Thank you.

GREETING TO THE STAFF OF FAO

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to meet with you, who work for the FAO, this important Organization of the United Nations. I greet you all with affection and I wish that each of you may live in harmony with those who are beside you in your family and in every realm in which your daily life unfolds. Through your work, often hidden but precious, you come in contact with various ordinary and extraordinary events which aim to promote productive policies in the agricultural sector and in the fight against malnutrition. You have, in particular, the opportunity to approach the problems and the suffering of those populations who have the right to improved living conditions.

I thank you for your service in this international sphere, which aims to reduce chronic hunger and develop the food and agricultural sectors throughout world. I know that you have a spirit of solidarity and understanding toward all, and that you know how to go past the paper, to see beyond every file the weary faces and tragic situations of the people suffering from hunger and thirst. Water is not free, as we so often think. It is a grave problem that can lead to war. In every institutional public sphere, in yours above all, there is great need of people who distinguish themselves not only through their professionalism but also through an outstanding sense of humanity, understanding and love. I invite you to be caring and sympathetic toward the weakest, according to the example of Jesus who has taken on the suffering and ills of humanity, to avoid becoming discouraged in the face of difficulties, and to be ever ready to support one another and thus look to the future with hope. Your hidden work looks at the people — men, women, children, grandfathers, grandmothers — people who are hungry. And, as I said recently, these people ask us for nothing but dignity. They ask for dignity, not alms! This is your work: to help so that dignity may reach them. I assure you of my prayer and I ask each of you to pray for me and for my service. Thank you!