



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 39th SESSION
OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS [F.A.O.]**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 11 June 2015*

[Multimedia]

Mr President, Your Excellencies, Mr Director-General, Distinguished Permanent Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good morning!

1. I am happy to welcome you who are attending the 39th Conference of the FAO, thereby continuing a long tradition. I address my cordial greeting to you, President La Mamea Ropati, to the Representatives of the various Nations and Organizations present, and to the Director-General, Professor José Graziano da Silva.

I still have a vivid memory of participating in the [Second International Conference on Nutrition](#) (20 November 2014), which called on the States to find solutions and resources. I hope that that decision does not remain only on paper or in the intentions that guided the negotiation, but that the responsibility may decisively prevail to respond concretely to the hungry and to all those who are expecting agricultural development to address their situation.

In the face of the poverty of so many of our brothers and sisters, I think at times that today the issues of hunger and of agricultural development are among the very many problems in this time of crisis. Yet we see growing everywhere the number of those who are struggling for access to regular and healthy meals. But instead of acting we prefer to delegate, and to delegate at all levels. And we think: someone else will take care of it, perhaps another Country, or that Government, that International Organization. Our tendency to “desert” in the face of difficult issues is human, or rather, it is an attitude that we often adopt even if then we do not fail to attend a

meeting, a conference, or the drafting of a document. Instead, we must respond to the imperative that *access to necessary nutrition is a right of all*. Rights do not permit exceptions!

It is not enough to highlight the statistics on world nutrition, although it is necessary to update the figures, because it shows us the harsh reality. It can surely comfort us to know that that one billion and 200 million hungry in 1992 has been reduced, even with a growing world population. It is of little use, however, to take note of the numbers or even to plan a series of concrete tasks and recommendations to apply to policies and investments, if we neglect the duty to “eradicate hunger and prevent all forms of malnutrition worldwide” (FAO-WHO, *Rome Declaration on Nutrition*, 15.a, November 2014).

2. *Statistics on waste are very worrisome*: one third of the food produced falls under this heading. It is just as distressing to know that a large quantity of agricultural produce is used for other purposes, perhaps good purposes, but which do not meet the immediate needs of the hungry. So, let us ask ourselves what we can do. Rather, what am I already doing?

Waste must be reduced. Furthermore, it is essential to study the non-food use of agricultural products, employed in large quantities for animal feed or to produce biofuels. Of course, increasingly healthy environmental conditions must be guaranteed, but can we continue to do so by excluding someone? All countries must be made aware of the type of nutrition to adopt, and this varies according to latitude. In the global South attention is focused on producing sufficient quantities of food to meet the needs of a growing population. In the North the focus is on the quality of nutrition and foodstuffs. But both quality and quantity are subject to uncertainties in the climate, increasing demand and fluctuating prices.

Therefore let us try to assume with more determination the commitment to *modify lifestyles*, then perhaps we will need fewer resources. Moderation does not counter development, on the contrary, it is by now obvious that it has become one of its conditions. For the fao, this also means continuing to decentralize in order to stand in the midst of the rural world and to understand the needs of the people that the Organization is called to serve.

Let us further ask ourselves: *how does the market and its rules affect world hunger*? It has emerged from your studies that beginning in 2008 the trend of food prices has changed: doubled, then stabilized, but always with higher figures in comparison to the preceding period. Such fluctuating prices prevent the poorest from making plans or from being able to count on even minimal nutrition. The causes of this are many. Climate change rightly worries us, but we cannot overlook financial speculation: for example the high prices of wheat, rice, corn, soy, which fluctuate on the stock market, perhaps they are linked to profits and, therefore, the higher the price the greater the profit. Here too, let us take a different path, agreeing that the produce of the land has a value that we might call “sacred”, for it is the fruit of the daily labour of people, families, communities of farmers. A labour often dominated by uncertainty, concern about climatic

conditions, anxiety over the possible destruction of the harvest.

The FAO's objectives include agricultural development, work on the land, fisheries, livestock, forestry. This development needs to be the central concern of investment, clearly distinguishing the different needs of farmers, breeders, fishermen and those who work in forestry. *The primacy of agricultural development* is the second objective. Regarding the FAO's objectives, this means ensuring effective *resilience*, reinforcing in a specific way the ability of the populations to confront crises — natural or man-made — paying attention to the different needs. This way it will be possible to aim for a dignified standard of living.

3. There are other critical areas in this task. First of all it seems difficult to accept the widespread resignation, the disinterest or indeed the lack of commitment of so many, even States. At times one feels that hunger is an unpopular topic, an unresolvable problem, which has no solution within the legislative or presidential mandate and therefore, does not reach a consensus. The reasons leading to the limited sharing of ideas, technology, expertise and financing lie in the lack of willingness to take on binding commitments, because we hide behind the issue of the global economic crisis and the notion that hunger exists in all countries: "If I have hungry people in my territory, how can I consider allocating funds to international cooperation?". But in so doing we forget that in a country poverty is a social problem to which solutions can be offered; in other contexts it is a structural issue and social policies alone are not enough to address it. This attitude could change if we placed solidarity back at the heart of international relations, moving it from words to policy choices: *the policy for the other*. If all Member States operate for the other, the consensus for the work of the fao would not be long in arriving; indeed the original function, that "*Fiat panis*", which figures in its emblem, would be rediscovered.

I think then of *educating people in correct nutrition*. In my daily meetings with Bishops from many parts of the world, with political representatives, economic leaders, academics, I increasingly realize that today even dietary education has many variations. We know that in the West the problems are high consumption and waste. In the South, on the other hand, to guarantee food it is necessary to subsidize the local production, which in many countries with "chronic hunger" is replaced by outside foodstuffs and perhaps initially through aid. Emergency aid, however, is not enough and does not always end up in the right hands. Thus dependence upon large producers is created, and if the country lacks the necessary economic means, then the population winds up unable to feed itself and hunger increases.

Climate change then, leads us back to the forced displacement of populations and to so many humanitarian tragedies due to the shortage of resources, starting with water, which is already the subject of conflicts that will eventually increase. It is not enough to state that there is a right to water without acting to achieve the sustainable consumption of this asset-resource and to eliminate all waste. Water is a symbol used in the rites of many religions and cultures to indicate belonging, purification and interior conversion. Starting from this symbolic value, the FAO can be

instrumental in revising models of behaviour so as to guarantee, today and in the future, that all can have access to the water indispensable for their needs and for farm work. There comes to mind that passage from Scripture which invites us not to abandon the “the fountain of living waters, and hew out cisterns for ourselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (cf. Jer 2:13): a warning to say that technical solutions are useless if they overlook the centrality of the human person, which is the measure of every right.

In addition to water, land use continues to be a serious problem. Increasingly worrisome is *agricultural land grabbing* by transnational companies and States, which not only deprives farmers of an essential asset, but directly undermines the sovereignty of countries. There are now many regions in which the food produced is exported and the local population becomes doubly poor because it has neither food nor land. Then what can be said about the women who in many areas cannot own the land they work, with unequal rights that prevent serenity in family life due to the danger, from one moment to the next, of losing the field? Yet we know that in the world the global production of foodstuffs is for the most part the work of family farms. Therefore, it is important that the fao strengthen partnership and the projects for family farms, and motivate States to regulate the equitable use and ownership of land. This could help to eliminate the various forms of inequality, now the focus of international attention.

4. Food security must be achieved even if peoples are diverse in terms of geographic locations, economic situations or food cultures. Let us work to harmonize the differences and let us join forces, thus we will never again read that food security for the North means eliminating fats and promoting exercise, and for the South, obtaining at least one meal a day.

We must begin from our daily routine if we want to change lifestyles, conscious that our small acts can ensure sustainability and the future of the human family. And then let us continue the fight against hunger without ulterior motives! The FAO's forecast indicates that by 2050, with a population of nine billion inhabiting the planet, production must increase and even redouble. Instead of being shocked by the data, let us modify our relationship with natural resources, land use; let us modify consumption, avoid the slavery of consumerism; let us eliminate waste and thus we will defeat hunger.

The Church through her institutions and her initiatives walks with you, conscious that the earth's resources are limited and their sustainable use is absolutely imperative for agricultural development and nutrition. For this reason the Church is committed to fostering the necessary change of attitude for the good of future generations. May the Almighty bless your work!
