



The Holy See

MESSAGE TO THE 1st WORLD FOOD DAY*

The International Food and Agriculture Organization has decided to promote, on 16 October 1981 - the thirty-sixth anniversary of its institution - the first World Food Day. This initiative should drive home not just to experts but to public opinion, to the whole of mankind, the serious and urgent problems of hunger and malnutrition, and mobilize the energies of everyone to meet them in solidarity.

I am happy to participate in this event, by becoming the spokesman of all those who are tragically suffering from undernourishment and who appeal to the conscience of their brothers and sisters. I am thinking particularly of the eight hundred million or so men, women and children who are living in a state of absolute poverty, and of all those who subsist under conditions too precarious to ensure bread for the next day. If it is already the duty of every person to be concerned about this, how could those who profess to follow Christ forget that he identified himself with the hungry?

So I wish to join all those who again proclaim today the necessity of recognizing and guaranteeing every person concretely the exercise of his fundamental right to nourishment. To this right there corresponds the duty of continual, planned action for organic development according to a new international order, capable of ensuring, above all, enough food in the various countries of the world.

Now a serious imbalance is becoming more and more marked between the needs of populations in vast areas and the food available. How could we fail to be concerned about the acute crises that are foreseen in the near future in several continents? On the basis precisely of the observations of the FAO experts, I had drawn attention to this tragedy at the threshold of this year (cf. Homily on 1 January).

Certainly, complex factors explain this situation. There are on the one hand natural calamities. But man always has his own share of responsibility. For it is less a question of an overall insufficiency of food products in the world than of a lack of availability and exploitation of the immense riches

concealed in nature and intended for common use. Can it not also be said that sometimes the priority character of agriculture has been underestimated in the overall process of development? There is, furthermore, an unfair distribution of the product of work, not to mention excessive expenses to meet superfluous needs or to amass costly armaments in a dangerous way.

FAO knows better than anyone: the fulfillment of the right to food cannot be limited to aid in the form of immediately indispensable food or to occasional initiatives, although this is of course necessary in emergency cases.

It is necessary in the first place to secure more widely for the populations that are suffering from malnutrition actual access to the various riches of nature, in the subsoil, in the sea and on the earth. Above all, another agricultural policy and another trade system must be envisaged, because, it is a fact, the efforts of the last two decades of development are far from having solved the problems. New ways unquestionably should be adopted which will permit each country, as far as possible, to provide for its own food needs, without depending too much on foreign exports. As I said in my recent encyclical, "Radical and urgent changes are necessary in order to restore to agriculture - and to rural people - their just value as the basis for a healthy economy, within the social community's development as a whole" (*Laborem Exercens*, n. 21).

Today a concerted effort must be made by everyone: by governments, whatever their economic and political system may be; by intergovernmental and non- governmental organizations; by various associations of volunteers, and I am thinking in particular of the ones inspired by the Churches and communities of believers. It is in the framework of this indispensable international cooperation that the initiatives of FAO take their place, according to its specific function. The Holy See hopes that this Organization will be able to carry out its mission in a truly ever more efficient manner and in full conformity with the ideals expressed in its statutes. The Holy See also hopes, therefore, that its action will be recognized and supported with increased means by governments and member States.

On the occasion of this first World Food Day, I express my warm encouragement and my fervent wishes to all those who are working to solve the crucial question of hunger, particularly to all the representatives of these member States and organizations present, especially to the Director-General of FAO, to the officials and the whole staff of FAO. I pray to God - whom we ask every day for the daily bread necessary for everyone - to bless their persons and inspire in them competent and disinterested action in the service of the subsistence of all their brothers and sisters.

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