



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO MR JACQUES DIOUF
ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD FOOD DAY 2004***

To Mr Jacques Diouf

Director General

of the Food and Agriculture Organization

*of the United Nations (FAO)*¹. Today's celebration of World Food Day is a good opportunity to repeat my appreciation of the activity you carry out as the head of the FAO. Everyone knows of the Organization's efforts to fight poverty in the rural world, especially by fostering the development of those whose daily lives in this context often involve hard work. The Day's theme: "*Biodiversity for Food Security*", highlights a practical means of fighting the hunger and malnutrition of so many of our brothers and sisters. Indeed, to reach the goal of adequate food security, a proper management of biological diversity is essential in order to guarantee the survival of the different animal and plant species. This effort demands ethical and not merely technical and scientific considerations, although the latter are indispensable to assure the preservation of these resources and their use in accordance with the practical needs of the world population.² Unfortunately, many obstacles today stand in the way of international action to conserve biodiversity. Despite the existence of increasingly effective regulations, other interests seem to upset the just balance between the sovereignty of States over the resources in their territory and the ability of individuals and communities to retain or manage these resources in terms of real need. International cooperation must therefore also be based on the principle which claims that sovereignty over the genetic resources present in the different ecosystems cannot be exclusive nor become a cause of conflict; it must be exercised in accordance with the natural rules of humanity that govern coexistence among the different peoples that make up the human family. These are some of the basic ideals that direct the FAO's activity and have made it possible, among other things, to promote the norms of the Treaty on Phytogenetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, a valid means to achieve the desired results. The Treaty also protects the rights of farmers, guaranteeing their participation in decision-making processes and especially motivating them to be concerned not only with the quantity of food they produce, but also with its quality. In this context, it is particularly necessary to remember the indigenous communities and peoples. Their vast patrimony of culture and knowledge associated with biodiversity risks disappearing because of the lack of proper protection. In fact, there is a real and visible danger of an abusive exploitation of their land and the destruction of their traditional *habitat*, as well as a failure to protect their intellectual patrimony, whose importance for the conservation of biodiversity is recognized.³ It is urgently necessary in many areas to revise the strategy which has thus far been followed in order to protect the immense and irreplaceable resources of the planet and to achieve not only sustainable development but above all, development with solidarity. Solidarity, properly understood as

a model of unity that can inspire the action of individuals, government authorities, international organizations and institutions and all members of civil society, strives for the proper growth of peoples and nations and its objective is the good of each and every one (cf. Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 40). Solidarity, therefore, by overcoming selfish attitudes regarding the order of creation and its produce, safeguards the various ecosystems and their resources, the people who live there and their fundamental rights as individuals and community members. If solidarity is firmly founded on this reference to the human person, with his or her nature and needs, it can draw together plans, norms, strategies and actions that are perfectly sustainable. Development that goes hand in hand with solidarity can also offer responses to targets of sustainability, mindful not only of the simple protection of the environment or an abstract reference to the needs of future generations, but also of the requirements of justice, a fair distribution of resources and the obligation to cooperate. These are essentially human needs to which the Catholic Church has always been attentive, in order to support them and to encourage their correct and complete application. The mandate that the Creator gave to human beings to have dominion over the earth and to use its fruits (cf. Gn 1: 28), considered in the light of the virtue of solidarity, entails respect for the plan of creation through human action that does not imply challenging nature and its laws, even in order to reach ever new horizons, but on the contrary, preserves resources, guaranteeing their continuity and availability to the generations to come.⁴ These are a few reflections that I wanted to offer to all who are celebrating World Food Day, wherever in the world they may be, and to all who, with their various offices and responsibilities, do what they can to help rid humanity of the scourge of hunger and malnutrition. It is hoped that today's celebration will help to encourage progress across the globe and locally through renewed "sharing" of the earth's resources. Upon you, Mr Director General, and upon all those who with devotion and dedication collaborate in the realization of the FAO's objectives, I invoke an abundance of Blessings from the Most High. *From the Vatican, 15 October 2004* **JOHN PAUL II**

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