



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 22nd SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF FAO*

Thursday, 10 November 1983

*Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Director General,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates and Observers,*

1. I am very happy that so many expert representatives of the States belonging to FAO and to the International Organizations who have come from all over the world to take part in this Twenty-second Session of the Conference have accepted the invitation to a meeting which has become traditional from the very beginning of the presence of FAO in Rome. It is the second time that I personally have met you, in addition to my visit to the Headquarters of FAO in November 1979, an occasion which remains a happy memory.

I am glad to have the present opportunity to say once more how deeply I esteem the work being done by FAO, and how much I appreciate the recent documentation on the world food situation and on the work programmes and operational aspects of FAO. I am sure that you are more and more aware of the Holy See's very special interest in the problem of overcoming hunger and malnutrition, and of the fact of its close study of all undertakings and activities directed towards this humanitarian goal.

2. The right to have enough to eat is certainly an inalienable human right, and it imposes the obligation to ensure that everyone really does have enough food. It is obvious that the food problem cannot be considered from the point of view of occasional assistance or of the mere increase of production.

I know that the subject of food security is at the centre of the working programme of FAO and has been so especially during the last ten years since the World Food Conference of November 1974. But today a more detailed view of food security is rightly being built up. It includes three specific objectives: to guarantee sufficient production; to stabilize as far as possible the flow of resources, especially for meeting emergencies; to make all the resources necessary for continuous and organic development available to all those needing them.

In order permanently to guarantee adequate supplies for the whole world population, two things must be done: favour the production and availability of food, at accessible prices, for a population that is continually expanding; and, more immediately, face the difficulties and crises in particular countries and regions.

3. According to the evaluations provided by your documentation, over the last ten years food production has increased by a growth index higher than the increase of population. From the sum of many data on different aspects of production and consumption, there emerges a comforting affirmation of a global sufficiency of food in relation to the present and future demands of the world population, even though this latter is increasing. But with regard to individual countries or certain areas, one cannot remain silent about the seriousness of the present situation, which is also confirmed by the forecasts, for the coming decades, of the real problem of the imbalance between population and actual food availability.

Particular concern is caused by the ever more obvious divergence, in practically the whole of the developing countries, between the food production growth index and the rate of population growth. This is in particular contrast with the fact that, in the developed countries taken as a whole, food production will continue to increase, resulting in surpluses with respect to the internal demand of these countries with a stable population.

But it is important to note the statement contained in a study with which you are familiar: "The lands of the Developing World as a whole (excluding East Asia) are capable of producing sufficient food to sustain twice their year 1975 population and one and a half times their year 2000 population, even with low level of inputs". (FAO/UNFPA/IIASA Report FPA/INT/513).

4. This contradictory situation leads one to emphasize the moral duties deriving from the relationships between States and which must be borne in mind as criteria that should also inspire the decisions of your present Session of the Conference of FAO.

The reaffirmation of the primacy of agriculture and of the whole series of problems concerning the increase of food production certainly continues to be important. But it is clear that, over and above an increase of world production considered on a worldwide scale, what is urgently needed is to ensure an effective increase in the individual developing countries. It seems extremely significant that today emphasis is placed upon the objective of the food self-sufficiency of these countries,

secured by their self-development, also with external support, but attained according to the now classical definition of self-reliance. Added to this is justified concern to avoid the aggravation of the phenomenon of the new form of dependence upon the developed countries, a phenomenon which has become more marked particularly in recent years, with the developing countries needing to import foodstuffs.

5. I therefore repeat a central subject of the Message which I sent for the third World Food Day: it is a fresh appeal for solidarity, addressed to the Governments and peoples of all the continents, and involving the "accelerated establishment of an international economic order that is truly more just and fraternal on the level both of production and the distribution of goods" (Message of 16 October 1983).

There remains the need to restate the duty of all countries to increase production: this holds good also for the most advanced. It must also be noted that the concentration of reserve stocks, which also exceed the limit considered by FAO as necessary for minimum security, is found in a restricted geographical area, in which a small number of countries hold almost a half of the world grain reserves. In addition, there are signs of a reduction of the area of cultivated land, not only as a result of erosion and the encroachment of deserts, but also through an artificial reducing of production. An effort must be made to avoid the situation whereby the abandonment of cultivation would lessen the capacity to provide needy countries with basic foodstuffs.

But it is clear that in this phase the most obvious objective is certainly that of distribution. This implies a distribution which is favourable to the developing countries, and an efficient control of commercial exchanges, above all with a reversal of protectionist tendencies.

6. Making foodstuffs available on acceptable conditions demands a reduction of excessive consumption in certain countries. It also requires an abandonment of the excessive defence of food prices by the high-production countries. Also called for are special measures in favour of countries with a low income and a food deficit, in order to assist ordinary importation of agricultural food products, and especially to facilitate imports required by emergency needs.

It is sad to have to note that in this phase there is a constant reduction in food aid.

One notes a contraction of the resources made available through the preferable multilateral means, while at the same time one does not see a corresponding increase of bilateral aid. Also with regard to reserves, one notes the praiseworthy favouring of the setting up of national reserves in the developing countries. But this does not mean an abandonment of the willingness to establish effectively international reserves placed at the disposal of multilateral organisms, or at least a system of coordinated national reserves.

But a fair distribution also calls for a wider access of all countries to all the factors, both proximate

and remote, required for concrete development: these especially include loans on favourable terms to the poorer countries, thus bringing about an effective redistribution of income between the peoples. The stabilization of flows of resources, and technical assistance programmes, have become of primary importance.

7. In my Message of 16 October I explicitly stated: "It is clearly all the countries most advanced in their development, and their Governments, that are the first to be faced by the urgency of this international solidarity".

I would like to add that this also implies the acceptance of binding commitments. As in other matters, one cannot fail to call for renewed goodwill in patiently seeking Agreements and Conventions, if possible also on points that are clearly delineated but concretely fixed and put into practice. In this sense one repeats the invitation to resume the necessary initiatives in the appropriate forums, for renewing the Conventions on grain trade and on the connected food assistance programmes; or at least the adoption even in a partial form of the objectives for food security, as in the proposal formulated by FAO.

The remarks made so far hold good not only for the produce of the land but also, especially at the present moment, they concern the aspects of fish products, in connection with the acceptance and putting into practice of the international norms sanctioned in the Convention on the new law of the sea.

8. A recent proof of the Holy See's continuing willingness to collaborate in all suitable initiatives has been given on the occasion of the meeting of scientists of world renown on the relationship between science and the fight against hunger.

The Pontifical Academy of Science has borne and continues to bear witness to the Church's willingness, also on the level of science, to collaborate even in the specific objectives of agricultural and food development (cf. *L'emploi des fertilisants et leur effet sur l'accroissement des récoltes, notamment par rapport à la qualité et à l'économie*, P.A.S. Scripta Varia, 38, 1973; and *Humanité et Energie*, P.A.S. Scripta Varia, 46, 1981).

9. Among the points on the agenda of this Session of the Conference of FAO particular emphasis is given to the urgent need for more training: to develop the abilities of people to share in their own development, and to prepare competent professionals. In this sphere too I would like to repeat that the Church's institutions and associations are very willing to make available their various resources for assisting in teaching and formation.

I would also add that the Church is able to collaborate in the proper forming of public opinion, so that not only the developing countries but still more the advanced ones will be able to assume the sacrifices demanded by solidarity and will work together constructively, using the resources placed

at their disposal.

As I express the hope that the present Session will favour the effective accomplishment of the work programme of FAO for the next two years, I invoke upon your labours the light and the enthusiasm that come from Almighty God, in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

*AAS 74 (1982), p. 35-39.

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