



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II ON THE OCCASION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF FAO**

*Thursday, 16 November 1989*

*Mr. President,*

*Mr. General Director,*

*Your Excellencies,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*1. As the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization continues to develop as an important point of encounter for the political experiences of all countries, the Holy See has followed attentively the decisions of the more important specialized inter-governmental agencies of the UN. It has been especially pleased to note the work of the General Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization within the specific field of its competence. FAO has sought to play an indispensable role, together with other organizations involved in questions of agriculture and food supply, in safeguarding the basic human right to be fed adequately. This goal requires an effective and continuous effort to guarantee the access of individuals and peoples to sufficient food supplies as part of the greater process of development worldwide.2. The complexity of mounting an adequate and effective campaign against hunger and malnutrition is becoming more and more apparent. Today, fifteen years after the World Food Conference of 1974, we have been made aware of the need for a careful and objective consideration of the many factors bearing upon problems of world economic development and social progress. This is particularly evident in light of rapid population increases, especially on certain continents, and a world economy that presents phases of recession and difficulties in implementing domestic economic policies even in highly industrialized countries. For this reason, it is best to avoid purely global and negative descriptions of the existing situation. Instead, existing observations and assessments, however disappointing they have been hitherto, ought to become a stimulus to new reflection on the possibility, and indeed the duty, of concerted action on the part of States and intergovernmental organizations. This sort of activity must necessarily be gradual and will need to be adjusted to the changing conditions of individual countries and the overall world situation. In effect, what is needed is a real determination not only to define the goal of justice, but also to achieve that goal through an activity grounded in moral solidarity.3. If it is operative anywhere, this moral solidarity must be characteristic of the various member-States of FAO. An effective struggle against hunger and malnutrition will depend upon a united course of action undertaken first of all by those Organizations and agencies directly involved with issues of food and agriculture. Aside from FAO, these would include IFAD, the World Food Programme and the World Food Council.4. The struggle against hunger has ramifications in the area of investment as well. Here too, international monetary or financial

organizations, in coordinating loans and payments on the world, regional, local and group level, are called to demonstrate a cooperation born of solidarity. Indeed, it is quite possible that the problem of foreign indebtedness, particularly that of the developing countries, can begin to be confronted through appropriate recourse to such multilateral Organizations. Besides their operational contributions, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank with its affiliated organizations, have also made important suggestions aimed at discerning criteria for readjusting the economy of indebted countries, and for indicating appropriate measures which aim at renewing domestic economic policy in order to foster its real and organic development. These suggestions must be taken into serious account. Finally, it is important to make certain that all foreign aid, not merely financial aid, be the fruit of a solidarity on the part of the wealthy with those who are poorer a solidarity that employs truly disinterested measures, as opposed to measures that would constitute new forms of domination.<sup>5</sup> The struggle against hunger involves, in a way that is becoming ever more evident, the requirement that the nations of the entire world be subject to generally recognized and workable norms in the business sector. This is particularly important for the less developed countries, in order to safeguard their ability to export their products, especially agricultural ones. What must be avoided are all those recurring forms of protectionism which end in creating increasing obstacles to trade or, in some cases, actually barring developing countries from access to markets. In this regard, an evaluation of the patterns of conduct emerging in those businesses developing within GATT is in order. There, for the first time, updated criteria for mutual regulation in commercial relations among States have been established. These criteria have a direct reference to agro-alimentary products and to the possibility of their trade on the world market.<sup>6</sup> Concern must also be voiced about the deterioration of food security in the present world situation. Indeed, parallel to the notable increase in world population there has been a recent decline on the world level in the availability of foodstuffs. The result has been a reduction of those reserves which constitute a needed guarantee against crises of hunger and malnutrition. Similarly, in the countries where production is high, this has been artificially reduced by a sector-oriented policy, which reflects a closed market calculation. Whatever its domestic value, such a policy is certainly not in harmony with a solidarity open to world needs and acting in favour of those who are most needy.<sup>117</sup> The protection of the natural environment has become a new and integral aspect of the development issue. When we pay proper attention to its ecological dimension, the struggle against hunger appears even more complex, and calls for the establishment of new bonds of solidarity. Concern for ecology, seen in connection with the process of development and in particular the requirements of production, demands first of all that in every economic enterprise there be a rational and calculated use of resources. It has become increasingly evident that an indiscriminate use of available natural goods, with harm to the primary sources of energy and resources and to the natural environment in general, entails a serious moral responsibility. Not only the present generation but also future generations are affected by such actions.<sup>8</sup> Economic activity carries with it the obligation to use the goods of nature reasonably. But it also involves the grave moral obligation both to repair damage already inflicted on nature and to prevent any negative effects which may later arise. A more careful control of possible consequences on the natural environment is required in the wake of industrialization, especially in regard to toxic residue, and in those areas marked by an excessive use of chemicals in agriculture. The relationship between problems of development and ecology also demands that economic activity project and accept the expenses entailed by environmental protection measures demanded by the community, be it local or global, in which that activity takes place. Such expenses must not be accounted as an incidental surcharge, but rather as an essential element of the actual cost of economic activity. The result will be a more limited profit than was possible in the past, as well as the acknowledgment of new costs deriving from environmental protection. Those costs must be taken into account both in the management of individual businesses and in nation-wide programmes of economic and financial policy, which must now be approached in the perspective of regional and world economy. In the end, we are called to

operate beyond narrow national self-interest and a sectorial defense of the prosperity of particular groups and individuals. These new criteria and costs must find their place in the projected budgets of programmes of economic and financial policy for all countries, both the developed and the developing.<sup>9</sup> Today, there is a rising awareness that the adoption of measures to protect the environment implies a real and necessary solidarity among nations. It is becoming more apparent that an effective solution to the problems raised by the risk of atomic and atmospheric pollution and the deterioration of the general conditions of nature and human life can be provided only on the world level. This in turn entails a recognition of the increasing interdependence which characterizes our age. Indeed, it is increasingly evident that development policies demand a genuine international cooperation, carried out in accord with decisions made jointly and within the context of a universal vision, one which considers the good of the human family in both the present generation and in those to come.<sup>10</sup> Finally, I am pleased to note the very particular attention which FAO has given to the women's issue, as it emerges in agricultural and rural development problems. This attention helps make the transition from those affirmations of the dignity and equality of women contained in the Universal Declarations of the United Nations and in certain regional organizations to the many more specific questions involving women's integration into the overall process of agricultural and food development. It also helps to suggest appropriate applications, not only in the developing countries but also in those that are industrially advanced. I am particularly pleased that in addition to paying due attention to the strictly economic aspects of women's contribution both to agricultural production and to the transformation and commercialization of food products, one also finds explicit reference to women's dignity as human persons as the basis for their just integration not only in the production process but into the life of society as a whole. I find here a clear parallel to my teaching in the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*. In that Letter, I made reference to various dimensions of the Christian vision of the dignity and vocation of woman. It is my conviction that only within a perspective of an affirmation of the dignity of women as human persons can there come about a just consideration of their participation in socio-economic development, rural progress and civil growth. Finally, I wish to express my appreciation for the treatment of those themes which have been explored by the work of the present General Conference of the FAO. I am pleased that in the preparatory documentation those themes were treated not only with regard to the programme and budget of the coming two-year period, but within the broader perspective of the major problems of the present day. It is my hope that FAO will succeed in making a vital contribution to that international strategy for development which the United Nations Organization has sought to encourage and which men and women of every nation increasingly perceive as an urgent demand of justice and human solidarity in today's world. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen: upon all of you, and upon Your work, I cordially invoke God's abundant blessings. © Copyright 1989 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana