



# The Holy See

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## *Discours au Sommet mondial sur l'alimentation\**

*13 novembre 1996*

1. I am particularly grateful to accept your kind invitation to speak to the delegations of the 194 countries taking part in the World Food Summit. I thank you for your warm welcome. Sharing your concerns, I am anxious to acknowledge and encourage your efforts to come to the aid of those children, women, elderly people or families who are suffering from hunger or who are not properly nourished. To find an appropriate response to the tragic situations of many countries, you are responsible for studying the technical problems and for proposing reasonable solutions.

2. In the analyses which have accompanied the preparatory work for your meeting, it is recalled that more than 800 million people still suffer from malnutrition and that it is often difficult to find immediate solutions for improving these tragic situations. Nevertheless, we must seek them together so that we will no longer have, side by side, the starving and the wealthy, the very poor and the very rich, those who lack the necessary means and others who lavishly waste them. Such contrasts between poverty and wealth are intolerable for humanity.

It is the task of nations, their leaders, their economic powers and all people of goodwill to seek every opportunity for a more equitable sharing of resources, which are not lacking, and of consumer goods - by this sharing, all will express their sense of brotherhood. It requires "firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 38). This spirit calls for a change of attitude and habits with regard to life-styles and the relationship between resources and goods, as well as for an increased awareness of one's neighbour and his legitimate needs. It is to be hoped that your reflections will also inspire concrete measures to combat food insecurity, which claims as its victims too many of our brothers and sisters in humanity, for nothing will change at the world level, if national leaders do not put into practice the commitments written in your plan of action for implementing economic and food policies based not

only on profit but also on sharing in solidarity.

3. As you have observed, demographic considerations alone cannot explain the poor distribution of food resources. We must abandon the sophism which consists in affirming that “being numerous means being condemned to poverty”. Man, by his intervention, can modify situations and respond to increasing needs. Education provided for everyone, equipment adapted to local situations, wise agricultural policies and equitable economic networks can be so many factors which will produce positive effects in the long run. A numerous population can become a source of development, for it involves the exchange of and demand for goods. This does not, of course, mean that demographic growth can be unlimited. In this area, each family has its own duties and responsibilities, and State demographic policies must respect the dignity of human nature as well as the fundamental rights of individuals. To believe that any arbitrary stabilization of world population or even its reduction could directly solve the problem of hunger would nonetheless be an illusion: without young people's work, without the contribution of scientific research, without solidarity between peoples and generations, agricultural and nutritional resources would probably become less and less reliable and the poorest categories would remain below the poverty line and excluded from economic circulation.

4. It should also be recognized that populations subjected to conditions of food insecurity are often constrained by political situations that prevent them from working and producing normally. Think, for example, of the countries ravaged by conflicts of all kinds or sometimes struggling beneath the stifling weight of an international debt, of refugees forced to leave their land and all too often deprived of help, of the peoples who are victims of embargos imposed without sufficient discernment. These situations require the practical application of peaceful means to settle controversies or differences which may arise such as those proposed by the World Food Summit Plan of Action (cf. n. 14).

5. I am of course aware that among the most important long-term commitments are those concerning forms of investment in the agricultural and food sector. It seems essential here to make a comparison with the sums allocated for defence or the superfluous spending which is customary in the most developed countries. Urgent choices are required both at the national and international levels and at the level of the different communities and families, for identifying significant ways of guaranteeing food security in the majority of countries. This is a component of peace which does not only consist in building up considerable food reserves, but especially in giving each individual and family the possibility of having sufficient food at all times.

6. Your intention is to make demanding commitments in these fields, especially as regards their economic and political dimension. You would like to find the most suitable measures to encourage local agricultural production and the protection of farm land, while safeguarding natural resources. The proposals contained in the Plan of Action aim by political action and legal measures at guaranteeing a just sharing of productive land, at promoting the activities of agricultural and

co-operative associations, and at protecting market access for the benefit of rural populations. You have also drafted suggestions for international aid to the poorest countries and for a fair determination of trade terms and access to credit. All this will certainly be inadequate if efforts are not made to teach people justice, solidarity and the love of all human beings, who are their brothers and sisters. The elements contained in your different commitments could serve to boost good relations between peoples, by a constant exchange, a real 'culture of giving', which should make every country prepared to meet the needs of the less fortunate~, as I said on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the FAO (cf. Address 23 October 1995, n. 4; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 1 November 1995, p. 7). Food security will be the fruit of decisions inspired by an ethic of solidarity, and not only the result of mutual aid programmes.

7. In the Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, written in preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, I proposed concrete initiatives of international solidarity. I felt it a duty to call for “reducing substantially, if not canceling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations” (n. 51). Last week, when I received the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, I reiterated the Church's esteem for some of the commitments made by the international community. I renew my encouragement here that the steps undertaken will be brought to completion. For her part, the Church has decided to continue her efforts to enlighten those who have to make decisions with important consequences. In its recent document *World Hunger – A Challenge for All: Development In Solidarity*, the Pontifical Council “*Cor Unum*” made several proposals intended to foster a more equitable division of food resources, which, thanks to God and human labour, are not lacking today and will not be lacking in the future. Good will and generous policies must encourage human ingenuity, so that the vital needs of all can be met, also by virtue of the universal purpose of the earth's resources.

8. Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, you realize that you can count on my encouragement, and the presence of an Observer Mission at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization should suffice to assure you of the Holy See's interest in your work and your efforts to eliminate the spectre of hunger from the world. You know, besides, how many sons and daughters of the Catholic Church are active in numerous local organizations that are working to help the poorer countries improve their production and to discover on their own, “in full fidelity to their own proper genius, the means for their social and human progress” (Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*, n. 64).

I am pleased to recall that the motto of the Organization which has welcomed us today is “*Fiat panis*”, and that it is closely akin to the prayer dearest to all Christians, taught to them by Jesus himself: “Give us this day our daily bread”. Then let us work together without respite, so that everyone everywhere may have bread on his table to share. May God bless all those who produce it and are nourished by it!

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