



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE THIRTY-THIRD
CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO)****

Thursday, 24 November 2005

*Your Excellencies, Prime Ministers,
Mr. President,
Mr. Director General,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen!*

I am pleased to welcome the representatives of the Member States, on the occasion of the Thirty-third Conference of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. This is our first meeting and it allows me to see at close hand your efforts in the service of a great ideal: that of liberating humanity from hunger. To all I offer a respectful greeting, particularly the Director General, Mr. Jacques Diouf. I offer him my heartfelt good wishes at the beginning of his new mandate.

Today's meeting is an appropriate occasion to express my sincere appreciation for the programmes which FAO, in its diverse agencies, has carried out for the past sixty years, defending with competence and professionalism the *cause of man*, beginning precisely with the basic right of each person to be "free of hunger". Humanity is presently experiencing a worrisome paradox: side by side with ever new and positive advances in the areas of the economy, science and technology, we are witnessing a continuing increase of poverty. I am certain that the experience which you have accumulated in these years can help to develop a method adequate to the task of combating hunger and poverty, one shaped by that concrete realism which has always characterized the work of your distinguished Organization. In recent years FAO has worked for broader cooperation and has seen in the "dialogue of cultures" a specific means of ensuring greater development and secure access to food. Today more than ever, there is a need for concrete, effective instruments for eliminating the potential for conflict between different cultural,

ethnic and religious visions. There is a need to base international relations on respect for the person and on the cardinal principles of peaceful coexistence, fidelity to commitments undertaken and mutual acceptance by the peoples who make up the one human family. There is likewise a need to recognize that technical progress, necessary as it is, is not everything. True progress is that alone which integrally safeguards the dignity of the human being and which enables each people to share its own spiritual and material resources for the benefit of all.

Here I wish to mention the importance of helping native communities, all too often subjected to undue appropriations aimed at profit, as your Organization recently pointed out in its *Guidelines on the Right to Food*. Also, it must not be forgotten that, while some areas are subject to international measures and controls, millions of people are condemned to hunger, even outright starvation, in areas where violent conflicts are taking place, conflicts which public opinion tends to neglect because they are considered *internal, ethnic* or *tribal*. Yet these conflicts have seen human lives systematically eliminated, while people have been uprooted from their lands and at times forced, in order to flee certain death, to leave their precarious settlements in refugee camps.

An encouraging sign is the initiative of FAO to convene its Member States to discuss the issue of agrarian reform and rural development. This is not a new area, but one in which the Church has always shown interest, out of particular concern for small rural farmers who represent a significant part of the active population especially in developing countries. One course of action might be to ensure that rural populations receive the resources and tools which they need, beginning with education and training, as well as organizational structures capable of safeguarding small family farms and cooperatives (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 71).

In a few days many of the participants in this Conference will be meeting in Hong Kong for negotiations on international commerce, particularly with regard to farm products. The Holy See is confident that a sense of responsibility and solidarity with the most disadvantaged will prevail, so that narrow interests and the logic of power will be set aside. It must not be forgotten that the vulnerability of rural areas has significant repercussions on the subsistence of small farmers and their families if they are denied access to the market. A consistent course of action would call for recognizing the essential role of the rural family as a guardian of values and a natural agent of solidarity in relationships between the generations. Consequently, support should also be given to the role of rural women and at the same time to children for whom not only nutrition but also basic education must be assured.

Ladies and Gentlemen, conscious of the great complexity of your work, I nonetheless offer these reflections for your consideration, since I am convinced that the hearts of all need to be increasingly open to the many people in our world who lack their daily bread. The work of this Conference will show the strength of the growing conviction that what is needed is a courageous struggle against hunger. May Almighty God illuminate your deliberations and grant you the strength needed to persevere in your indispensable efforts to serve the common good. To all I

renew my cordial good wishes for the full success of the work of your Conference.

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