



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE TWENTY-SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS***

Hall of Benediction

Thursday, 14 November 1991

Mr Chairman,

Mr Director-General,

Your Excellencies,

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*1. I am very pleased to meet once again the representatives and experts of the States and Organizations associated in the *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*. This Twenty-sixth General Assembly is particularly worthy of note, because it marks the *fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the headquarters of FAO in Rome*. I offer heartfelt good wishes on this significant occasion. The selection of this city as the centre of your activity has helped to foster an especially close level of understanding and collaboration between your Organization and the Holy See. It is encouraging to see the many convergences between the new objectives and methods which the Organization has evolved for itself and the Church's teaching about social development and her call to understand it in the light of the ethical dimension and transcendent destiny of the human person.2. Even after four decades of intense efforts by men and women of good will *the objectives of FAO continue to have a pressing urgency*. Now as much as in the past, there is a need to make the production and distribution of food more efficient, to improve the lot of agricultural workers and thus to contribute to the general expansion of the world economy, in order to eliminate hunger from our world. As one charged with continuing "the teaching and activity of Christ, from whom the sight of a hungry crowd prompted the moving exclamation: 'I feel sorry for all these people; they... have nothing to eat' (Mt. 15:32)" (Pope Paul VI, *Address to Participants of the World Conference on Nutrition*, 9 November 1974), I take the occasion of this meeting to express once more my anxiety for the plight of the world's hungry. We share a burning concern for them, and so I pray that our meeting will be an opportunity for rededication to their service. Through long experience and the accumulation of extensive data, FAO's approach has moved beyond broad references to the struggle against hunger and a simple call for its elimination to a recognition of the multiplicity of hunger's causes and the need for a correspondingly sophisticated response. This insight into the complexity of the situation, far from dampening the zeal of the members of FAO, should serve as a spur, to action, since efforts made to remedy problems which have been accurately analyzed

stand the best chance of achieving success.³ The growing recognition of the many dimensions to be addressed in any attack on hunger and malnutrition has led to the identification of important social and political issues which have a direct impact on the matter. *Concern for the health of the environment* is one of the issues which has a particular bearing on the concerns of FAO, and its complex ramifications have to be taken into account in any campaign against hunger. In fact, respect for the fields, forests and seas, and their preservation from over-exploitation, from the very foundation of any realistic policy aimed at increasing the world's food supply. The world's natural assets, given by the Creator in trust to all mankind, are the source from which human labour brings forth the harvest upon which we depend. With the aid of scientific expertise, *sound practical judgment* must point out the path which lies *between the extremes of asking too much of our environment and asking too little*, either of which would have disastrous consequences for the human family. Growing awareness of the finite resources of the earth casts into ever sharper relief the need to make available to all who are involved in food production the knowledge and technology required in order to ensure that their efforts will yield the best possible results. The wide-spread establishment of training-centres and institutions which foster the sharing of know-how and skill is one of the most effective lines of action to be pursued in the struggle against hunger. The development of the specifically human capacity to work increases vastly the otherwise limited potentiality of the earth. Hence, the emphasis must be more and more on the application of productive intelligence. *The land and the sea yield their abundance precisely in the measure in which they are worked with wisdom*. As I wrote in my Encyclical Letter "Centesimus Annus": "Today the decisive factor (in production) is increasingly man himself" (John Paul II, Centesimus Annus, 32; cf. 31). I am happy to note that this truth about man's labour is reflected in your *Medium-Term Plan, 1992-97*, with its emphasis on the importance of human resources for solving the problem of hunger.⁴ Ladies and Gentlemen, the Holy See is deeply interested in the specific role of FAO as an impetus for socio-economic development. The guiding principle of the Church's teaching on development is expressed in the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution "Gaudium et Spes", which states: "In the socio-economic realm too, the dignity and total vocation of the human person must be honoured and advanced along with the welfare of society as a whole. For man is the source, centre and the purpose of all socio-economic life" (Gaudium et Spes, 63). *Development which is worthy of the human person must aim at advancing people in every aspect of life*, the spiritual as well as the material. Indeed, economic advancement achieves its proper end precisely to the degree that it advances the whole good and destiny of human beings. One of the implications of this truth is that the clear affirmation of *the dignity and worth of those who work to produce our food* is an indispensable part of any solution to the problem of hunger. They are special cooperators with the Creator as they obey his command to "subdue the earth" (cf. Gen. 1:28). They perform the vital service of providing society with the goods needed for its daily sustenance. The recognition of their dignity is echoed in the call of FAO for rural people to be regarded not as mere means of increasing food production "but as the ultimate users and beneficiaries of the development process" (*Medium-Term Plan*, p.75). It is of particular importance in this regard to design *programmes which will increase the scope for free and responsible action* by farmers, fishermen and those who manage forestry resources, and will enable them to take an effective part in formulating the policies which affect them directly. It is also important to keep in mind that projects aimed at eliminating hunger *must be in harmony with the fundamental right of couples to establish and foster a family* (cf. John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, 42). Any initiative which would seek to increase the world's food supply by an assault upon the sanctity of the family or by interference with parents' right to decide about the number of their children would oppress rather than serve the human race (cf. Gaudium et Spes, 47; John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, 42; *Id.*, Laborem Exercens, 25). Rather than forbidding the poor to be born, truly effective programmes for developing the food supply will ensure that the poor share even now in the material goods which they need in order to support their families, while they receive the training and assistance they require so that

eventually they can produce these goods by their own labour (cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus, 28*).⁵ The years leading up to this last decade of the Millennium have witnessed monumental shifts in relations between peoples and nations. The great changes which have taken place present FAO with new challenges and new opportunities. The disruption of what had become the customary patterns of production and exchange in many places means that the fight against hunger must be vastly extended. I am confident that your Organization, with its tradition of intergovernmental cooperation, will know how to respond effectively. The reduction of world tensions, for so long the goal of mankind's hopes and prayers, gives leaders of governments and their peoples a fresh chance to work together to build a society worthy of the human person. *The elimination of hunger and its causes must be a fundamental part of this project.* One hopes that a particular consequence of the lessening of antagonism in international relations will be a decrease in the amount of money spent on the manufacture and purchase of arms. The resources thus released can then be devoted to development and to food production. I pray *that the governments of the world will dedicate themselves to this noble task with the same energy as was given to protecting themselves against those whom they once considered their foes.*⁶ The tasks before you, Ladies and Gentlemen, will tax your wisdom and challenge your courage, but *you can take heart from the nobility of your cause, a nobility which more than justifies the effort and sacrifice involved.* You are pledged to ensure the satisfaction of the right to have enough to eat, to have a secure and stable share in the produce of land and sea. Renew your commitment to this struggle! In saying this I lend my voice to all the poor and hungry whom I have met on my Pastoral Visits to so many parts of the world. I pass on to you their appeal; I express to you their gratitude. I give the assurance of my prayers for the success of your deliberations in establishing your work project for the next two years, and I invoke upon you the peace and strength which comes from Almighty God, who "does not forget the cry of the afflicted" (Ps.

9:12).

*AAS 84 (1992), p. 978-981. *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XIV, 2 p. 1150-1157. *L'Osservatore Romano* 15.11.1991 p.5.

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