



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO JACQUES DIOUF
ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD FOOD DAY***

*To Mr. Jacques Diouf
Director General
of the Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations (FAO)*

The annual celebration of World Food Day, by focusing attention on FAO and its efforts to counter hunger and malnutrition, serves to remind us once more of the condition of countless people throughout the world who live in a state of inadequate food security. The conclusions of the *World Food Summit - Five Years Later* are still fresh in our minds. The international community is committed to guaranteeing that basic freedom from hunger and access to adequate and healthy food which are primary expressions of the right to life and respect for human dignity which are so often solemnly proclaimed but are still far from being a reality. In fact, while humanity's attainments offer the hope of a future more responsive to human needs, the world tragically remains divided between those who live in abundance and those who are lacking even what is essential for their everyday sustenance. This situation constitutes one of the most obvious obstacles for building a society worthy of humanity, a world that is truly human and fraternal. This year's chosen theme: "*Water, source of food security*" is an invitation to reflect on the importance of water, without which individuals and communities cannot live. As an indispensable factor in human activity, water is a basic factor of food security. Nor can we forget that water, a symbol used in the communal rites of many religions and cultures, signifies belonging and purification. In Christian terms, water is used as a sign of a process of interior transformation and conversion. From its symbolic value springs an invitation to be fully aware of the importance of this precious commodity, and consequently to revise present patterns of behaviour in order to guarantee, today and in the future, that all people shall have access to the water indispensable for their needs, and that productive activities, and agriculture in particular, shall enjoy adequate levels of this priceless resource. The growing awareness that water is a limited resource, but absolutely essential to food security, is leading many today to a change of attitude, a change which must be favoured for the sake of future generations. It is necessary for the international community and its agencies to intervene more effectively and visibly in this area. Such an intervention should be aimed at promoting greater cooperation in protecting water supplies from contamination and improper use, and from that exploitation which aims only at profit and privilege. In these efforts, the primary objective of the international community must be the well-being of those people – men, women, children, families, communities – who live in the poorest parts of the world and therefore suffer most from any scarcity or misuse of water

resources. The conclusions of recent international meetings have shown how the fight against hunger and malnutrition – and more generally the fight against poverty and in defence of the earth's ecosystems – has to be carried out in many diverse situations and amid rival interests. The first step in this effort is to regain a sustainable balance between consumption and available resources. We are all aware that without attention to the fundamental principles of the ethical and moral order, principles rooted in the heart and conscience of every human being, this objective cannot be attained. In fact, the order of creation and its delicate harmony are in danger of being irremediably compromised. Biblical wisdom reminds us not to abandon the "source of fresh water and life" in order to "hew out broken cisterns that can hold no water" (*Jer 2:13*). We can almost see here a warning about our own present situation. We are reminded, in other words, that technical solutions, no matter how developed, are not helpful if they fail to take into account the centrality of the human person, who, in his spiritual and material dimensions, is the measure of all rights and therefore must be the guiding criterion of programmes and policies. Adequate levels of development in every geographical area will be legitimately and respectfully guaranteed only if access to water is considered a right of individuals and peoples. For this to happen international policy must give fresh attention to the inestimable value of water resources, which are often not renewable and cannot become the patrimony of only a few since they are a common good of the whole of humanity. By their nature they "should be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity" (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 69). May this year's celebration of World Food Day serve to remind everyone of the very human dimension of the tragedy of hunger and malnutrition, and help the international community to reaffirm the moral imperative of solidarity. This must be the direction of efforts to ensure that every people and nation will have access to necessary water supplies in order to guarantee an appropriate level of food security. With this wish I invoke upon FAO, its Member States and its directors and personnel abundant heavenly blessings, and I renew to you, Mr Director General, the expression of my highest consideration. *From the Vatican, 13 October 2002*

IOANNES PAULUS II