



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO MR JACQUES DIOUF
ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD FOOD DAY 2003***

To Mr Jacques Diouf

Director General

of the Food and Agriculture Organization

of the United Nations (FAO) The celebration of World Food Day invites us to reflect on the fact that hunger and malnutrition threaten the survival of many of our brothers and sisters daily. This harsh reality is a cause of division between individuals, social groups, communities and countries; indeed, it epitomizes the gap existing between levels of development and life-expectancy in different regions of the world. The choice of this year's theme, *International Alliance against Hunger*, is significant, for hunger and the tensions arising from it can only be overcome by rapid and effective interventions brought about by a common will and joint efforts. This is moreover required by the objectives proclaimed at the beginning of the Millennium by the International Community and is the substance of the commitments made by the States taking part in the *World Food Summit - 5 years later*, which considered such an "Alliance" among the different parties working together in this endeavour a guarantee of concrete results. People are becoming increasingly aware of the need to unify aims and actions, as is the Church, which shares the hopes and sufferings of humanity. She is anxious to make her contribution to a solution that meets the expectations of each person. This prompts me, on the occasion of this World Food Day, to make a new appeal on behalf of the "Alliance against Hunger", an "Alliance" that must draw strength from a renewed understanding of multilateralism. And if this multilateralism is to be effective, it must be founded on the idea of the international community as a "family of nations" committed to pursuing the universal common good. As such, bringing about this "Alliance" requires the exercise of solidarity on the part of Governments, international organizations, and the men and women of every Continent; its foundation may be seen in the collective and shared responsibility for the common good and for the development of those who are poorest, so that every human being may become more a human being. The work of the FAO, well known to the member countries, shows that the distressing phenomenon of poverty and hunger cannot be attributed solely to environmental conditions, to economic processes or to the consequences of past situations. Natural events and environmental conditions do play a role in this tragedy. Nevertheless we must acknowledge that the lack of management, the expansion of ideological and political systems far removed from the concept of solidarity, and the increase of wars and conflicts, in contradiction of the fundamental principles of international coexistence, create and aggravate socio-economic injustices. Without overlooking other parts of

the world, my thoughts go especially to Africa, where the situation continues to be quite alarming: people there are not only suffering from an imbalance of food production and a consequent food shortage but are also burdened by conflicts, epidemics and constant displacements that in many cases could be prevented by implementing appropriate strategies and programmes based on the respect of human life and dignity. One of the most evident effects of all this is the reduction of cultivated areas. Moreover, so many of those countries afflicted by chronic political and institutional instability appear increasingly dependent on aid and on the importation of food from economically more developed nations, thus creating a truly unsustainable situation. Further forms of violence against life are not needed to resolve this distressing situation; what is required is the establishment of an international order inspired by justice and enlivened by a sense of brotherhood. The economically poorest countries — facing the constant worry of decreasing levels of food production and availability, and affected by the deterioration of agricultural and forest ecosystems — are often forced to give priority to the intensive cultivation of lands. In this way, they can at least sell their native products in the hope that they will thus be able to keep up with the pace set by the global market. As a result, agricultural techniques based on the relation between production and need, between the variety of species and the protection of the environment, are abandoned and the "circle of poverty", aptly described by the FAO as the principal cause of malnutrition and hunger, grows ever larger. In order to avoid this vicious circle of poverty, it is necessary to appeal to all the resources of science, technology and economics, always in accordance with the criteria of morality and justice. As the final stage of the *Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples* proclaimed by the United Nations gets under way, our attention needs to focus on concrete actions aimed at safeguarding the traditional wisdom of indigenous peoples and at supporting aboriginal communities living in very unfavourable conditions because of agreements on agricultural products, because of the failure to safeguard biodiversity or, in certain cases, because of the destruction of forest habitats and the uncontrolled exploitation of fishing resources. In fact, the abandonment of traditional agricultural methods, which arose and developed as a response to nutritional and health needs, is one of the causes of the increase of poverty among indigenous peoples. Subsequently, these peoples are drawn to urban centres, even being compelled to emigrate to them, suffering readily observable consequences for their quality of life and for their ability to preserve their specific identity. The Church, with her various institutions and organizations, wishes to play her role in this world "*Alliance against Hunger*". She intends to do this by her commitment to promote solidarity and to make it an element that gives shape to and is characteristic of personal and social relationships. Solidarity can then become the foundation of these relationships and build a culture of solidarity and love. The Church desires in this way to be faithful to the example and teaching of her Founder; convinced that one possible outcome of such an "*Alliance*" is reconciliation with God and among human beings, which is a privileged instrument for overcoming obstacles and divisions. By re-enforcing a conscious civilization of love that promotes authentic and fundamental values, she helps to keep selfishness and conflict from filling the void left by the absence of such values. For this reason, I ask the Christian communities, believers, and all men and women of good will to live and work increasingly in the service of the poor and the hungry, so that true reconciliation among individuals and peoples may come about. Participating actively in the joint and concerted struggle against poverty and hunger means taking part in setting up well-planned and resolute programmes of action on behalf of justice and peace. May we be sustained in this effort by the invitation that the Bible addresses to every member of the human family: "If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness . . . and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose waters fail not" (*Is 58:10-11*). It is in this hope and wholeheartedly that I invoke upon you, Mr Director General, upon all taking part in today's gathering and upon the future work of the FAO the light and strength of

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