



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 38th CONFERENCE
OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS (FAO)**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 20 June 2013*

*Mr President,
Your Excellencies,
Mr Director General,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. Continuing a long and meaningful tradition which began sixty years ago, I am pleased to receive you, the participants in the 38th Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. I thank President Mohammad Asef Rahimi and the representatives of many countries and different cultures who are working together to respond in a fitting way to the primary needs of so many of our brothers and sisters: those of receiving their daily bread and finding a dignified place at the table.

I greet the Director-General, Professor José Graziano da Silva, whom I had occasion to meet at the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome. On that occasion he made it clear to me that the situation worldwide is particularly difficult, not only because of the economic crisis but also due to problems associated with security, the great number of continuing conflicts, climate change and the preservation of biological diversity. All these situations demand of FAO a renewed commitment to tackling the many problems of the agricultural sector and of all those living and working in rural areas.

The initiatives and possible solutions are many, and are not limited to the increasing of production. It is a well-known fact that current levels of production are sufficient, yet millions of people are still

suffering and dying of starvation. This, dear friends is truly scandalous. A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being.

2. This, I believe, is the significance of our meeting today: to share the idea that something more can and must be done in order to provide a new stimulus to international activity on behalf of the poor, inspired by something more than mere goodwill or, worse, promises which all too often have not been kept. Nor can the current global crisis continue to be used as an alibi, a daily excuse. The crisis will not be completely over until situations and living conditions are examined in terms of the human person and human dignity.

The human person and human dignity risk being turned into vague abstractions in the face of issues like the use of force, war, malnutrition, marginalization, violence, the violation of basic liberties, and financial speculation, which presently affects the price of food, treating it like any other merchandise and overlooking its primary function. Our duty is to continue to insist, in the present international context, that the human person and human dignity are not simply catchwords, but pillars for creating shared rules and structures capable of passing beyond purely pragmatic or technical approaches in order to eliminate divisions and to bridge existing differences. In this regard, there is a need to oppose the shortsighted economic interests and the mentality of power of a relative few who exclude the majority of the world's peoples, generating poverty and marginalization and causing a breakdown in society. There is likewise a need to combat the corruption which creates privileges for some and injustices for many others.

3. Our present situation, while directly linked to financial and economic factors, is also a consequence of a crisis of convictions and values, including those which are the basis of international life. This is a larger framework which demands the undertaking of a conscious and sober work of rebuilding, one which also affects FAO. And I wish to highlight, I want to insist on the word: the work of rebuilding. Here I am thinking of the reform the Organization has initiated to ensure a more functional, transparent and impartial operation. This is certainly something positive, yet every authentic reform involves an increased sense of responsibility on the part of everyone, in the realization that our individual fate is linked to that of others. Human beings are not islands; we are a community. My thoughts turn to the well-known parable in the Gospel where a Samaritan helps someone in need. He is not prompted by philanthropy or the fact that he has money at his disposal, but by a desire to identify with the person he helps: he wants to share his lot. Indeed, after providing for the man's care, he announces that he will return to inquire after his health. What is involved here is more than mere compassion or perhaps a desire to share or to promote a reconciliation which can overcome differences and disagreements. It is a willingness to share everything and to decide to be Good Samaritans, instead of people who are indifferent before the needs of others.

What is demanded of FAO, its member States, and every institution of the international community, is openness of heart. There is a need to move beyond indifference and a tendency to look the other way, and urgently to attend to immediate needs, confident that the fruits of today's work will mature in the future. We cannot devise programs which are bureaucratic and antiseptic, which do not work today. Every proposal must involve everyone. To move forward constructively and fruitfully in the different functions and responsibilities involves the ability to analyze, understand, and engage, leaving behind the temptations of power, wealth or self-interest and instead serving the human family, especially the needy and to those suffering from hunger and malnutrition.

We are all aware that one of the first effects of grave food crises – and not simply those caused by natural disasters or violent conflicts – is the uprooting of individuals, families and communities. The separation is a painful one; it is not limited to their lands, but extends to their entire existential and spiritual environment, threatening and at times shattering their few certainties in life. This process, which is now taking place worldwide, demands that international relations once more be regulated by their underlying ethical principles and recover the authentic spirit of solidarity which can guarantee the effectiveness of every cooperative undertaking.

4. This is clearly seen in the decision to dedicate the coming year to the rural family. Apart from the celebrations themselves, it is necessary to reaffirm the conviction that every family is the principal setting for the growth of each individual, since it is through the family that human beings become open to life and the natural need for relationships with others. Over and over again we see that family bonds are essential for the stability of relationships in society, for the work of education and for integral human development, for they are inspired by love, responsible inter-generational solidarity and mutual trust. These are factors which can make even the most adverse situations more bearable, and bring a spirit of true fraternity to our world, enabling it to feel as a single family, where the greatest attention is paid to those most in need.

Acknowledging that the fight against hunger entails the pursuit of dialogue and fraternity means for FAO that its contribution to negotiations between States, giving new impulse to the decision-making processes, must be marked by the promotion of the culture of encounter and of solidarity. But this also calls for willingness on the part of the member States, a complete knowledge of particular situations, suitable preparation, and ideas which take into account every individual and every community. Only thus will it be possible to combine the thirst for justice experienced by billions of people with the concrete realities of today's world.

The Catholic Church, with all her structures and institutions, is at your side in this effort, which is aimed at building concrete solidarity, and the Holy See follows with interest and encourages the initiatives and activities undertaken by FAO. I thank you for this opportunity to meet you, and I bless the work which you carry out daily in the service of the least of our brothers and sisters. Thank you.

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