



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR THE WORLD FOOD DAY 2015

*To Prof. José Graziano da Silva
Director General of the FAO*

1. This day, on which the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is being celebrated, focuses on our many brothers and sisters who, despite their efforts, suffer from hunger and malnutrition. This is due first and foremost to the unfair distribution of the goods of the earth but also due to insufficient agricultural development. We are living in an epoch in which the unbridled search for profit, concentration on specific interests and the effects of unjust policies hinder the implementation of actions within countries or prevent effective cooperation in the international community. In this regard much remains to be done to ensure food security, which for many people still appears to be a distant goal. This painful situation, Mr Director General, renders it even more urgent to return to the inspiration which led to the birth of this Organization, and demands that we find the necessary means to free humanity from hunger and to promote agricultural and farming enterprises that can satisfy the actual practical needs of the various parts of the globe.

It is certainly an ambitious aim, but one which cannot be delayed and should be pursued with renewed determination in a world where the gap is widening between levels of wellbeing, revenue, consumption, access to health care assistance and education, as well as with regard to a longer life expectancy. We are witnesses, often silent and paralyzed, of situations which cannot be exclusively related to economic phenomena, since inequality is increasingly the result of that culture which rejects and excludes so many of our brothers and sisters from social life, fails to take their abilities into account and even deems their contribution to the life of the human family superfluous.

The theme chosen for World Food Day this year: *Social protection and agriculture — breaking the cycle of rural poverty* is important. This is a problem that underscores our responsibility towards

the two-thirds of the world population who lack even minimal social protection. This is rendered even more alarming by the fact that the majority of these people live in the most underprivileged countries where being poor is a discounted reality and the only source of survival is linked to meagre agricultural production, to small-scale fishing or to small-scale livestock breeding.

Indeed the lack of social protection weighs primarily on small farmers, breeders, fishermen and forestry workers who are forced to live in a precarious situation, because the result of their work is largely dependent on environmental conditions over which they often have no control, and on a lack of the wherewithal to cope with bad harvests or to obtain the necessary technical means. Paradoxically, then, even when production is plentiful they run into serious difficulties regarding the transportation, sale and preservation of the fruits of their labour.

During my journeys and pastoral visits I have had numerous opportunities to listen to these people expressing their difficulties and it is natural that I should offer to be the spokesman of the serious concerns that they have confided to me. Their vulnerability, in fact, has very heavy repercussions on their personal and family lives, already burdened by so many trials and tribulations or by back-breaking days and with no time schedule, unlike what applies to other categories of workers.

2. The condition of hungry and malnourished people shows that a generic appeal for cooperation or for the common good is not enough and we cannot stop at that. Perhaps a different question should be asked: is it still possible to conceive of a society whose resources are in the hands of the few which forces the least privileged to make do with no more than the crumbs?

The answer cannot be limited to suitable proposals but rather must consist of the “social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice; whenever this is violated, violence always ensues” (Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, n. 157). Indeed, both for people and communities, the lack of social protection is a negative factor in itself and cannot be seen only in terms of possible threats to public order, since the inequality concerns such fundamental factors as individual and collective wellbeing: for example, health, education and participation in decision-making processes.

I am thinking of the most destitute of people, of those who, because they lack social protection, suffer the negative consequences of the ongoing financial crisis or of phenomena linked to corruption and mismanagement, as well as being affected by climate change that jeopardizes their food security. They are people, not numbers, and they ask for our support to be able to look to the future with a minimum of hope. They ask governments and international institutions to act swiftly, to do all they can in their respective fields of responsibility.

Considering the rights of the hungry and accepting their aspirations means first of all expressing solidarity in practical actions, which require sharing and not only better management of social and financial risks or immediate help in the event of catastrophes and environmental crises. This is

what is required of the FAO, of its decisions and initiatives and of the practical programmes that are implemented in various places.

This anthropological perspective, however, shows that social protection cannot be limited to an increase in revenue or reduced to an investment in means of subsistence for an improvement in agricultural productivity and the promotion of equitable economic development. It must be achieved within that “social love” which is the key to genuine development (cf. *ibid.*, n. 231). If its essentially human components are considered, social protection can give increased resilience to the most disadvantaged people, enabling them to face and surmount difficulties and setbacks and at the same time, it will lead everyone to understand the real meaning of the sustainable use of natural resources and full respect for our common home. I am thinking in particular of the role that social protection can fulfil in supporting the family, whose members learn from the outset the meaning of sharing, mutual help and protection. Guaranteeing family life means promoting the financial development of women, thereby consolidating their role in society, as well as fostering care of the elderly and enabling the young to pursue scholastic and professional training in order to enter the world of work well prepared.

3. It is not the Church’s mission to address these problems directly from a technical standpoint. Nevertheless, the human aspects of these situations do not leave her indifferent. Creation and the goods of the earth are gifts of God bestowed upon all human beings who are at the same time their custodians and beneficiaries. For this reason these gifts are meant to be shared equitably by all. This demands the firm determination to face the injustices we meet with every day, particularly the most serious ones, those that offend human dignity and touch the very depths of our conscience. These are facts that do not permit Christians to abstain from actively contributing their professionalism, above all through the different forms of organization that do so much good in rural areas.

In the face of difficulties, pessimism and indifference cannot prevail. Despite the complexity of the problems, what has been achieved so far is already a cause of encouragement for the entire international community, due to its institutions and its courses of action. Among these I am thinking of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* recently approved by the United Nations. I hope that the *Agenda* will not remain merely a set of rules and possible agreements. I trust that it will serve to inspire a different model of social protection, at both the international and national levels. Such will prevent it from being used to the advantage of interests that are contrary to human dignity, or that fail to fully respect life, that justify omissive attitudes that leave problems unresolved, and thereby aggravate situations of inequality.

May each one, as far as he or she is able, give his or her best in a spirit of genuine service to others. In this effort the FAO’s action will be fundamental, as long as it has at its disposal the necessary means to assure social protection within the framework of sustainable development and the advancement of all those who make their living by farming, raising livestock, fishing and

forestry.

With these hopes I invoke upon you, Mr Director General, and on all those engaged in this service to the human family, the Blessing of God, who is rich in mercy.

From the Vatican, 16 October 2015

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