

## **BENEDICT XVI'S ADDRESS TO FAO**

### **"The Rural Family Is a Model"**

VATICAN CITY, JULY 1, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://Zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of the address Benedict XVI gave today to participants in the 37th session of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

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Mr. President,

Gentlemen Ministers,

Mr. Director General, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am particularly happy to receive you all who are participating in the 37th Conference of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, following a long and pleasant tradition initiated sixty years ago with the creation of FAO in Rome.

Through you, Mr. President, I wish to thank the numerous governmental delegations that wished to be present at this meeting, thus attesting to the effective universality of FAO.

I would also like to renew the Holy See's support for the meritorious and irreplaceable work of the Organization and to confirm to you that the Catholic Church commits herself to collaborate with your efforts to respond to the real needs of numerous brothers and sisters in humanity.

I take advantage of this opportunity to greet Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director General, who with efficiency and dedication has enabled FAO to address the problems and crises arising from the changing global realities that affect, even in a dramatic way, its specific field of action.

To the Director General elect, Mr. José Graziano da Silva, I express my most sincere wishes for the success of your future activity, with the hope that FAO can respond, ever more and better, to the hopes of its Member States and to contribute concrete solutions to persons suffering from hunger and malnutrition.

2. Your works have indicated policies and strategies capable of contributing to the important re-launching of the agricultural sector, of the levels of food production and of the more general development of rural areas. The present crisis that now affects all the aspects of the economic and social reality requires, in fact, every effort to try to eliminate poverty, the first step to free from hunger the millions of men, women and children who do not have their daily bread. A complete reflection, however, exacts that the causes of this situation be sought, without being limited to the levels of production, to the growing demand for

foods or the volatility of prices: factors that, though important, can make the tragedy of hunger be read in exclusively technical terms.

Poverty, underdevelopment and hence, hunger, are often the result of egoistic behavior that, coming from man's heart, is manifested in social action, in economic exchanges, in the market conditions, in the lack of access to food, and is translated in the negation of the primary right of all persons to nourish themselves and, therefore, to be free from hunger. How can we be silent about the fact that even food has become an object of speculations or is linked to changes in a financial market that, deprived of certain laws and poor in moral principles, seems anchored only in the goal of profit? Food is a condition that concerns the fundamental right to life. To guarantee it means also to act directly and without delay on the factors that, in the agricultural sector, weigh negatively on the capacity to produce, the mechanisms of distribution and the international market. And this, when global food production -- according to FAO and authoritative experts -- is capable of feeding the world population.

3. The international framework and the frequent fears caused by instability and the increase in prices, call for concrete and necessarily unitary answers to get results, which states, individually, cannot guarantee. This means to make of solidarity an essential criterion for every political action and every strategy, so that international activity and its rules are instruments of effective service of the whole human family and, in particular, of the neediest. Hence, it is urgent to have a model of development that considers not only the economic amplitude of the needs or the technical reliability of the strategies to be followed, but also the human dimension of all the initiatives, [a model] that is able to bring about genuine fraternity (cf. Caritas in Veritate, 20), appealing to the ethical recommendation "to feed the hungry," which belongs to the sentiment of compassion and humanity inscribed in the heart of every person and that the Church counts among the works of mercy. From this perspective, the institutions of the International Community are called to work in a coherent way following their mandate to support the values proper to human dignity, eliminating closed behavior and leaving no room to particular requests that are made to appear as general interests.

4. FAO is also called to re-launch its structure, freeing it from obstacles that remove it from the objective indicated by its Constitution: to guarantee nutritional growth, the availability of food production, the development of rural areas, in order to ensure for humanity freedom from hunger (cf. FAO, Constitution, Preamble). Essential for this objective is the full harmony of the Organization with the governments to direct and support initiatives, especially in the present circumstance, which sees the reduction of economic-financial resources, while the number of the hungry in the world does not diminish in keeping with the expected objectives.

5. My thought goes to the situation of millions of children who, as the first victims of this tragedy, are condemned to an early death, or to delay in their physical and psychic development or who are obliged to forms of exploitation to be able to receive a minimum of food. Attention to young generations can be a

way of resisting the abandonment of rural areas and agricultural work, to allow whole communities, whose survival is threatened by hunger, to see their future with greater confidence. We must say, in fact, that despite the commitments assumed and the consequent obligations, assistance and concrete aid is often limited to emergencies, forgetting that a coherent concept of development must be able to design a future for every person, family and community, favoring long-term objectives.

Hence, initiatives must be supported that are desired to be carried out in the ambit of the whole International Community to rediscover the value of the rural family enterprise and to support its central function to attain stable food security. In fact, in the rural world, the traditional family nucleus makes an effort to favor agricultural production through the wise transmission of parents to children, not only of systems of cultivation or conservation and distribution of foods, but also of ways of life, of educational principles, of culture, of religiosity, of the concept of the sacredness of the person in all the phases of his existence. The rural family is a model, not only of work but of life and of concrete expression of solidarity, where the essential role of woman is confirmed.

Mr. President, Ladies, Gentlemen,

6. The objective of food security is a genuinely human need, we are conscious of it. To guarantee it to the present generations and to those that will follow also means to preserve the natural resources from frenetic exploitation, because the race of consumption and waste seems to ignore all consideration of the genetic patrimony and of biological diversities, so important for agricultural activities. However, to the idea of an exclusive appropriations of these resources is opposed the call that God addresses to men and women so that "working and looking after" the land (cf. Genesis 2:8-17), they promote a participation in the use of the goods of Creation, an objective that multilateral activity and international rules can certainly help to attain.

In our time in which to the many problems that affect agricultural activity are added new opportunities to contribute to alleviate the drama of hunger, you can work so that through the guarantee of food corresponding to needs, each one can grow in keeping with his true dimension as a creature made in the likeness of God.

This is the hope I wish to express, while I invoke upon you and your work the abundance of divine blessings.

[Translation by ZENIT]