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منظمة  
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# CONFERENCE

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### ADDRESS BY THE HOLY FATHER, POPE FRANCIS

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*Mr. President,  
Ministers,  
Mr. Director-General,  
Distinguished Permanent Representatives,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Good morning!*

1. It is a pleasure to receive you here, as you participate in the 39th Session of the FAO Conference, thereby continuing a long-standing tradition. Cordial greetings to you, Mr. President, Le Mamea Ropati, to the representatives of the different nations and organizations present here, and to Director-General, José Graziano da Silva.

I still have vivid memories of participating in the *Second International Conference on Nutrition* (on 20 November 2014), which called on States to find solutions and resources. I hope that decision does not remain stuck on the paper or in the intentions that steered the negotiations, but that responsibility prevails decisively in responding practically to the hungry and those who look to agricultural development for a response to their situation.

Given the misery of many of our brothers and sisters, I sometimes think that the issue of hunger and agricultural development today has become just one of many problems at this time of crisis. Yet the number of people who have difficulties obtaining regular and healthy meals is growing all around us. But, instead of taking action, we prefer to delegate, and to delegate at all levels. We think that someone else will do something about it, perhaps another country or government, or an international organization. Our tendency to “go missing” in the face of difficult issues is human; yet we do not miss a meeting, or a conference, or the drafting of a document. Instead, we must respond to the imperative of *ensuring access to basic food as a right of all people*. Rights do not admit exclusions.

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It is not enough to provide status reports on nutrition around the world, although the figures do need to be kept up to date because they reveal the harsh reality. Certainly, we can console ourselves in the knowledge that those 1.2 billion hungry people in 1992 are now fewer, even though the world's population is growing. Nonetheless, it is of little use to know the numbers or even put forward a series of practical commitments and recommendations for implementing policies and investments, if we neglect the obligation to "Eradicate hunger and prevent all forms of malnutrition worldwide" (FAO-WHO, *Rome Declaration on Nutrition*, November 2014, 15a).

2. *The statistics on waste are very worrying*: one third of all food produced is lost. It is disconcerting to know that a large quantity of agricultural products is used for other purposes, which may be good ones but do not respond to the immediate needs of a hungry person. Let us ask then "What can we do?" or moreover, "What am I already doing myself?"

Reducing waste is essential; as is reflecting on the non-food use of agricultural products, which are used in large quantities as animal feed or to produce biofuels. Certainly, we must ensure an increasingly healthy environment, but can we continue to do this by excluding people? We need to raise awareness in all countries on the type of nutrition adopted, and this varies according to latitude. In the southern half of the world, attention needs to be placed on the quantity of food needed to sustain a growing population; in the North, in contrast, the key issue is the quality of nutrition and food products. But the insecurity caused by weather conditions, increasing demand and uncertain prices weighs heavily on both quality and quantity.

Let us try, therefore, to commit more decisively to *changing lifestyles*, and maybe we will need fewer resources. Sobriety is not in opposition to development; indeed it has now clearly become a condition for it. For FAO, this also means persevering with decentralization, to maintain its present in the midst of the rural world and to understand the needs of the people that the Organization is called upon to serve.

Let us also ask: to what extent does the market, with its rules, affect hunger in the world? The studies that you yourselves carry out show that, since 2008, food prices have varied in trend: doubling, then stabilizing, but always at higher levels than in the preceding period. This level of price volatility prevents the poorest from planning ahead or being able to count on a minimum level of nutrition. There are many causes. We are rightly concerned about climate change; but we cannot turn a blind eye to financial speculation: an example being provided by the prices of wheat, rice, maize and soya, which fluctuate on the commodity exchanges, sometimes linked to income funds, such that the higher their price, the more the fund earns. Here too, let us also seek another path, convincing ourselves that the products of the Earth have a value that can be considered "sacred", as the fruit of the daily work of people, families and farming communities. A type of work that is often dominated by uncertainties, worries about weather conditions, and anxieties about the possible loss of the harvest.

In FAO's objectives, agricultural development encompasses farming the land, fishing, livestock breeding and forestry. This development needs to be at the centre of economic activity, clearly distinguishing the different needs of crop farmers, livestock breeders, fishermen and those who work in the forests. *The primacy of agricultural development*: this is the second objective. For FAO's objectives, this means supporting *resilience-building*, aimed at strengthening communities' capacities to cope with crises, whether caused by nature or by mankind's activities, and paying attention to the different needs. In that way it will be possible to pursue a decent standard of living.

3. This commitment encompasses other critical points. Firstly, it is hard to accept a generic resignation or lack of interest, and even the absence of so many players, including States. Sometimes one has the impression that hunger is an unpopular topic, an intractable problem for which solutions cannot be found within a single legislative or presidential mandate; so the issue does not command consensus. The reasons underlying the reluctance to contribute ideas, technology, expertise, and financing stem from an unwillingness to assume binding commitments; because we hide behind the

world economic crisis and the idea that there is hunger in every country: “If there are hungry people in my country, how can I consider committing funds to international cooperation?” But this forgets that, while poverty in one country is a social problem to which solutions can be found, in other contexts it is a structural problem for which social policies alone do not suffice. This attitude could change if we put solidarity back at the heart of international relations, and turn words into policy choices: *the politics of the other*. If all Member States work for one another, consensus for action by FAO will not be long in arriving; and FAO’s original role will be rediscovered — that “*fiat panis*” that appears on its logo.

I also think of *education for a correct food diet*. In my daily encounters with bishops from all over the world, and with political personalities, economic leaders and academics, I increasingly see that nutritional education today is extremely varied. We know that in the West the problem is one of high levels of consumption and waste. In the South, however, ensuring food supply means promoting local production, which in many countries with “chronic hunger” is substituted by remittances from abroad and perhaps initially through aid. But emergency assistance is not enough and sometimes it falls into the wrong hands. This creates a reliance on large-scale producers and, if the country lacks the necessary economic means, the population ends up not feeding itself, and hunger spreads.

Climate change also makes us think of the forced displacement of populations and so many humanitarian tragedies caused by lack of resources, water first and foremost, which is already the cause of conflicts that can be expected to increase. It is not enough to proclaim a right to water, without making efforts to achieve sustainable consumption of this resource and prevent it from being squandered. Water continues to be a symbol used by the rites of many religions to signify belonging, purification, and inward conversion. Based on this symbolic value, FAO can help revise behavioural models to ensure, both now and in the future, that everyone can access the water that is essential to their needs, and for agricultural activities. This brings to mind the passage of Holy Scripture that advises us not to forsake the “fountain of living waters, to hew out cisterns for ourselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2.13): a warning that technical solutions are useless if they forget that the human person must be at the centre of everything — a principle that governs all rights.

Apart from water, land use also remains a serious problem. The hoarding of arable land by transnational firms and States is an increasing cause for concern, since it not only deprives farmers of an essential asset, but also directly affects the sovereignty of nations. Nowadays there are many regions in which the food produced goes to foreign countries, and the local population is doubly impoverished because they have neither food nor land. And what about the women who in many zones cannot own the land they work? What about the inequality of rights that makes a family life impossible, because they run the risk of losing their land at any moment? Yet we know that most of the world’s food is produced by family farms. So it is important for FAO to strengthen partnership and projects that promote family enterprises and encourage States to regulate land use and ownership fairly. This could help eliminate the inequalities that are now at the centre of international attention.

4. Food security must be achieved even though people are different owing to their geographic location, economic conditions or food cultures. Let us work to harmonize the differences and pool efforts; then we will no longer read that food security for the North means eliminating fat and encouraging movement; while for the South it consists in obtaining at least one meal a day.

If we want to change lifestyles, we must start from our daily life, in the knowledge that our small gestures can help ensure the sustainability and future of the human family. And let us continue the fight against hunger without ulterior motives. FAO projections show that by 2050, with 9 billion people on the planet, production must increase and even double. Instead of being impressed by the data, let us today change our relationship with natural resources, the use of land; let us change consumption patterns, without falling into the slavery of consumerism; let us eliminate waste, for that way we will conquer hunger.

The Church, with its institutions and initiatives, walks with you; aware that the planet's resources are limited and that using them sustainably is absolutely crucial for agricultural and food development. For that reason the Church is committed to promoting the change in attitude needed to ensure the well-being of future generations. May God Almighty bless your work.