

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS ATTENDING THE
"HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY:
THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIOENERGY" ORGANIZED BY THE
UNITED NATIONS FOOD AND
AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (ROME, 3-5 JUNE 2008)

Mr President of the Italian Republic,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Mr Director General of the FAO,
Mr Secretary General of the UN,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address my respectful and cordial greeting to you, who, in different capacities, represent the various components of the human family and are gathered in Rome to negotiate suitable solutions to face the problem of hunger and malnutrition.

I have asked Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, my Secretary of State, to express to you the particular attention with which I am following your work and assure you that I attribute great importance to the arduous duty that awaits you. Millions of men and women look to you while new snares threaten their survival and worrisome situations put the security of their Nations at risk. In fact, the growing globalization of markets does not always favour the availability of foodstuffs and the systems of production are often conditioned by structural limits not to mention by political protection and speculative phenomena that relegate entire populations to the margins of development processes. In light of this situation, one must strongly repeat that hunger and malnutrition are unacceptable in a world that, in reality, possesses production levels, resources and sufficient knowledge to put an end to these dramas and their consequences. The great challenge of today is "'to globalize' not only economic and commercial interests, but also the expectations of solidarity, with respect for and valuing the contribution of each component of society" (cf. Address to the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation, 31 May 2008).

To the FAO and to its Director General, therefore, go my appreciation and my gratitude, for having again drawn the international community's attention to what obstructs the fight against hunger and for having solicited it to take action, an action that must be united and coordinated in order to be effective.

In this spirit, to the high-level Personages participating in this Summit I should like to renew the wish that I expressed during my recent Visit to the UN Headquarters: it is urgent to overcome the "paradox of a multilateral consensus that continues to be in crisis because it is still subordinated to the decisions of a few" (Address to

United Nations' General Assembly, 18 April 2008). Furthermore, may I invite you to cooperate in an ever more transparent manner with the organizations of civil society committed to filling the growing gap between wealth and poverty. Again I exhort you to continue with those structural reforms that, on a national level, are indispensable to successfully confront the problems of underdevelopment, of which hunger and malnutrition are direct consequences. I know how arduous and complex it all is!

Yet, how can one remain insensitive to the appeals of those who, on the various continents, are not able to feed themselves enough to live? Poverty and malnutrition are not a mere fatality caused by adverse environmental circumstances or by disastrous natural calamities. On the other hand, considerations of an exclusively technical or economic character must not prevail over the rights of justice toward those who suffer from hunger. "The right to nutrition responds principally to an ethical motivation: 'give the hungry to eat' (cf. Mt 25: 35), that prompts a sharing of material goods as a sign of the love which we all need.... This primary right to nutrition is intrinsically linked to the safeguarding and to the defence of human life, the solid and inviolable rock upon which the whole edifice of human rights is founded" (Address to the new Ambassador of Guatemala, 31 May 2008). Each person has the right to life: therefore it is necessary to promote the effective actualization of such rights and the populations that suffer from lack of food must be helped to gradually become capable of satisfying their own needs for sufficient and healthy nutrition.

At this particular moment, in which food security is threatened by the rise in price of agricultural products, new strategies need to be worked out in the fight against poverty and the promotion of rural development. This must also happen through structural reform processes, that would enable the challenges of the same security and of climatic changes to be faced. Furthermore, it is necessary to increase the food available by promoting industrious small farmers and guaranteeing them access to the market. The global increase in the production of agricultural products, however, can be effective only if production is accompanied by effective distribution and if it is primarily destined to satisfy essential needs. It certainly is not easy, but it would allow, among other things, to rediscover the value of the rural family: it would not be limited to preserving the transmission, from parents to children, of the cultivation methods, of conserving and distributing foodstuffs, but above all it would preserve a model of life, of education, of culture and of religiosity. Moreover, from the economic profile, it ensures an effective and loving attention to the weakest and, by virtue of the principle of subsidiarity, it could assume a direct role in the distribution chain and the trading of agricultural food products reducing the costs of intermediaries and favouring small scale production.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's difficulties show how modern technology by itself, is not sufficient to provide for the lack of food, neither are statistical calculations nor, in emergency

situations, the sending of food supplies. All this certainly has a great impact, yet it must be completed and oriented to a political action that, inspired by those principles of the natural law which are written on the human heart, protect the dignity of the person. In this way, also the order of Creation is respected and one has "the good of all as a constant guiding criterion" (Message for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2008, n. 7). Hence, only by protecting the person is it possible to overcome the main causes of hunger, such as being closed to one's neighbour which dissolves solidarity, justifies models of consumeristic life and unravels the social fabric, preserving, if not actually deepening the furrows of unjust balances and neglecting the most profound demands of good (cf. Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 28). If, therefore, respect for human dignity were given its worth on the negotiation table, in making decisions and accomplishing them, it would be possible to rise above otherwise insurmountable obstacles and it would eliminate, or at least diminish, the disinterest in the good of others. Consequently, it would be possible to adopt courageous measures that would not stop before hunger and malnutrition, as if they were simply considered unsolvable, endemic phenomena. It could help if, in the defence of human dignity, international action - even emergency action - were to estimate the superfluous in the perspective of the needs of others and to administer the fruit of Creation according to justice, placing it at the disposition of all generations.

In the light of these principles, I hope that the Delegations present at this meeting will take on new commitments and be resolved to accomplish them with great determination. The Catholic Church, for her part, desires to join in these efforts! In a spirit of collaboration, drawing on ancient wisdom, inspired by the Gospel, she makes a firm and heartfelt appeal that is very relevant for those participating in the Summit: "Give to eat to the one who is starving of hunger, because, if you do not give to him to eat, you will kill him" (cf. *Decretum Gratiani*, c. 21, d. LXXXVI). I assure you that, along this path, you can count on the support of the Holy See. Although it differentiates itself from States, it is united to their most noble objectives to seal a commitment that, by her nature, involves the entire international community: to encourage every People to share the needs of other Peoples, placing in common the goods of the earth that the Creator has destined for the entire human family. With these sentiments, I express my most fervent wishes for the success of your work and invoke the Blessing of the Most High upon you and upon those who are committed to the authentic progress of the person and of society.

From the Vatican, 2 June 2008

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI