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Message of the Holy Father Francis for the Inaugural Session of the 40th General Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

The following is the text of the Message from the Holy Father for the Inaugural Session of the 40th General Conference of the FAO:

Message of the Holy Father

Mr President,

I offer my respectful and cordial greetings to you, and to all the Representatives of the Member States of FAO, as you assemble for the Organization's fortieth Conference.

My greeting also goes to the Director-General and to the leaders of the other International Organizations present at this meeting, which is called to provide appropriate responses to issues involving the agricultural and food production sector, on which the expectations of millions of people depend.

1. I regret that I cannot be present with you today, as has been an established tradition dating back to the beginning of FAO's presence in Rome. I have therefore asked Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State, to convey to you my message of encouragement and support, as well as my respect and esteem for the demanding task that you must carry out.

The Holy See closely follows the work of the international community and wishes to assist its efforts to promote not mere progress or development goals in theory, but rather the actual elimination of hunger and malnutrition. All of us realize that the intention to provide everyone with his or her daily bread is not enough. Rather, there is a need to recognize that all have a right to it and they must therefore benefit from it. If the goals we continue to propose still remain distant, that is largely dependent on the lack of a culture of solidarity, which fails to make headway amid other international activities, which often remain bound only to the pragmatism of statistics or the

desire for efficiency that lacks the idea of sharing.

The commitment of each country to increase its own level of nutrition, to improve agricultural activity and the living conditions of the rural population, is embodied in the encouragement of the agricultural sector, in increased production or in the promotion of an effective distribution of food supplies. Yet this is not enough. In effect, what those goals demand is a constant acknowledgment that the right of every person to be free of poverty and hunger depends on the duty of the entire human family to provide practical assistance to those in need.

Hence, when a country is incapable of offering adequate responses because its degree of development, conditions of poverty, climate changes or situations of insecurity do not permit this, FAO and the other intergovernmental institutions need to be able to intervene specifically and undertake an adequate solidary action. Since the goods that God the Creator has entrusted to us are meant for all, there is an urgent need for solidarity to be the criterion inspiring all forms of cooperation in international relations.

2. A glance at the current world situation does not offer us a comforting picture. Yet we cannot remain merely preoccupied or, worse, resigned. This moment of evident difficulty must make us even more conscious that hunger and malnutrition are not only natural or structural phenomena in determined geographical areas, but the result of a more complex condition of underdevelopment caused by the indifference of many or the selfishness of a few. The wars, acts of terrorism and forced displacements that increasingly hinder or at least strongly condition even cooperative efforts are not inevitable, but rather the consequence of concrete decisions. We are dealing with a complex mechanism that mainly burdens the most vulnerable, who are not only excluded from the processes of production, but frequently obliged to leave their lands in search of refuge and hope. Likewise, decisions taken in full freedom and conscience determine the data relative to assistance given to poor countries. This continues to decrease daily, in spite of reiterated appeals in the face of ever more devastating crisis situations emerging in different areas of the planet.

We need to be aware that in these cases the freedom of choice of each must take into account solidarity towards all, in relation to actual needs, and the fulfilment in good faith of commitments undertaken or proclaimed. In this regard, inspired also by the desire to encourage governments, I would like to make a symbolic contribution to the FAO programme that provides seeds to rural families in areas affected by the combined effects of conflicts and drought. This gesture is offered in addition to the work that the Church continues to carry out, in accordance with her vocation to stand at the side of the earth's poor and to accompany the effective commitment of all on their behalf.

This commitment is asked of us today by the 2030 Development Agenda, when it restates the idea that food security is a goal that can no longer be put off. Yet only an effort inspired by authentic solidarity will be capable of eliminating the great number of persons who are undernourished and deprived of the necessities of life. This is a very great challenge for FAO and for all the Institutions of the international community. It is also a challenge that the Church is committed to on the front lines.

It is my hope that the sessions of this Conference can give renewed impulse to the work of the Organization and provide the practical responses needed and desired by millions of our brothers and sisters. For they see in the activity of FAO not only a technical contribution to increase resources and to distribute the fruits of production, but also a concrete and even unique sign of a fraternity that helps them to look to the future with confidence.

May Almighty God, who is rich in mercy, bless you and your service, and grant you the strength needed to contribute to the authentic progress of our human family.

From the Vatican, 3 July 2017

Francis

