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Message of the Holy Father Francis to the Director General of the FAO for World Food Day

Today, World Food Day, which this year takes the theme: *Our actions are our future: A Zero Hunger world by 2030 is possible*, the Holy Father Francis has sent to the director general of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (F.A.O.), Mr. José Graziano da Silva, the following message:

Message of the Holy Father

To Professor José Graziano da Silva
Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization

Distinguished Director General,

1. The annual celebration of *World Food Day* emphasizes, in today's international context, the needs, yearnings and hopes of millions of persons who lack bread each day. Increasingly, there are more people who sadly make up part of that great number of human beings who have nothing, or almost nothing, to eat. It should be the opposite and yet recent statistics are a painful proof of how international solidarity appears to be cooling. And when solidarity is lacking, everyone today is conscious that technical solutions and projects, including the most developed, are not capable of facing up to the sadness and bitterness of those who are suffering because they cannot feed themselves sufficiently and in a healthy way.

The theme that concerns us this year, *Our actions are our future: A Zero Hunger world by 2030 is possible*, becomes an urgent call to responsibility on the part of all those actors who are in agreement with the objectives of the 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development*, a rallying cry to wake us from the slumber that often paralyzes and inhibits us. It cannot be just another day, contenting ourselves with amassing information or satisfying our curiosity. We have to "become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it" (*Laudato Si'*, 19). As a consequence, we are all invited, especially the FAO, its member States, the national and international organs and institutions, civil society and all persons of good will, to redouble our commitment so that no one lacks the

necessary food, neither in quantity nor in quality.

2. The poor expect from us an effective help that takes them out of their misery, not mere propositions or agreements that, after studying in a detailed way the roots of their misery, bear as their fruit only solemn events, pledges that never materialize, or impressive publications destined only to enlarge library catalogues. In this twenty-first century that has seen considerable advances in the field of technology, science, communications and infrastructure, we ought to feel shame for not having achieved the same advances in humanity and solidarity, and so satisfy the primary needs of the most disadvantaged. Neither can we console ourselves simply for having faced emergencies and desperate situations of those most in need. We are all called to go further. We can and we must do better for the helpless. We must move to concrete action, so that the scourge of hunger disappears completely. This requires policies of cooperation for development which, as the *2030 Agenda* indicates, are oriented towards the real needs of the poor. It is also necessary to give particular attention to the levels of agricultural production, access to food markets, involvement in initiatives and actions and, above all, to the realization that, when it comes to making decisions, countries are equal in dignity. It is also essential to understand that, when it is a question of effectively confronting the causes of hunger, grandiose declarations will not definitively eradicate this scourge. The struggle against hunger urgently demands generous financing, the abolition of trade barriers and, above all, greater resilience in the face of climate change, economic crises and warfare.

3. One of the principles that must guide our life and our commitment is the conviction that “time is greater than space” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 222), which means that we have to drive forward, with clarity, conviction and tenacity, processes sustained over time. The future is not up somewhere in the clouds, but is rather built by promoting and accompanying processes of greater humanization. We can dream of a future without hunger, but this is only reasonable when we engage in tangible processes, vital relations, effective plans and real commitments. The *Zero Hunger 2030* initiative offers a favourable framework for this and, without doubt, will serve to fulfill the second of the *Sustainable Development Goals* of the *2030 Agenda*, which seeks “to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.” Some may say that we still have twelve years ahead in which to carry this out. Nevertheless, the poor cannot wait. Their devastating circumstances do not allow this. That is why we must act in an urgent, coordinated and orderly way. An advantage of these proposals is that they provide specific goals, quantifiable objectives and precise indicators. We know that we have to combine harmoniously two ways of offering assistance, both long-term and short-term actions, in order to deal with the concrete realities of those who, today, suffer the distressing and painful onslaught of hunger and malnutrition.

4. If in past years the activities of the FAO and of other international institutions have been characterized by tension between the long and the short term, so that a variety of programs and interventions could come together in the same area, today we know well that it is equally essential to unite together both the global and the local levels in response to the challenge of hunger. In this sense, the *2030 Agenda*, with the *Sustainable Development Goals*, and the *Zero Hunger* initiative, require international entities, like the FAO, to engage responsibly the member States so that they can undertake and implement initiatives at the local level. Global indicators are of no use if our commitment does not correspond to the reality on the ground. It is vital, therefore, that the priorities and the measures enshrined in important programs should be firmly established and shared widely, so as to avoid individualistic approaches, facing together and in a determined way the challenge to combat hunger and misery. This must be done in the context of suitable institutional, social and economic support that offers fruitful initiatives and solutions so that the poor do not feel overlooked yet again.

5. We do indeed have the adequate means and framework so that beautiful words and good wishes may become an action plan of substance that leads effectively to the eradication of hunger in our world. To this end we need joint efforts, upright hearts, and persistent concern to firmly and resolutely make the other's problem one's own. And yet, as with other pressing issues that affect humanity, we often encounter immense obstacles to solving problems. We find inevitable barriers that are the fruit of indecision or delays, and a lack of enthusiasm on the part of responsible political leaders who are often absorbed purely by electoral concerns or are focused on biased, transitory or limited perspectives. There is a fundamental lack of political will. What is needed is the willingness to end hunger, and this ultimately will not happen without a moral conviction that is shared by all peoples and all religious persuasions, where the integral good of the person is at the heart of all initiatives and

consists in “doing to another what we would want done to ourselves.” We are speaking of an action based on solidarity among all nations and of the means that express the disposition of the people.

6. To pass from words to action in order to eradicate hunger requires not only political decision-making and effective planning. It is likewise necessary to overcome a reactive approach by allowing room for a more proactive vision. A superficial and fleeting view, in the best of cases, can provoke instant reactions. In this way we overlook the structural aspects that shroud the tragedy of hunger: extreme inequality, poor distribution of the world’s resources, consequences of climate change and the interminable and bloody conflicts which ravage many regions, to mention only some of its causes. We need to develop an approach that is more proactive and more sustained over time, we need an increase of funds destined to foster peace and the development of peoples. We need to suppress weaponry and the deadly arms trade in order to hear the voice of those who cry desperately, seeing themselves abandoned on the peripheries of life and progress. If we really want the world’s population to adopt this perspective, it is imperative that civil society, media and educational institutions join forces in the right direction. From now until 2030 we have 12 years to set up initiatives that are vigorous and consistent; not giving in to occasional spurts or intermittent and fleeting headlines, but rather facing up unrelentingly to hunger and its causes in a spirit of solidarity, justice and consistency.

7. These, Director General, are some reflections that I wish to share with those men and women who do not allow themselves to succumb to indifference; who hear the cry of those who do not have the minimum needed to lead a dignified life. For her part, the Catholic Church, in the exercise of the mission with which her divine Founder has entrusted her, struggles daily throughout the world against hunger and malnutrition in multiple ways and through her various structures and associations, remembering that those who suffer from misery are not different from us. They share our flesh and blood. They deserve, then, a friendly hand to help and support them, in such a way that no one is left behind, so that in our world fraternal solidarity may boast its own identity card and citizenship, beyond any flashy slogans void of substance.

I pray to the Almighty that this journey of pioneering and favouring concrete actions for a future marked by peaceful and fruitful coexistence may be filled with his blessings, for our good and the good of the generations to come.

From the Vatican, 16 October 2018

FRANCIS
