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Intervention of the Holy See Permanent Observer at the United Nations Organizations and Bodies for Food and Agriculture at the central headquarters of the FAO

The following is the intervention given yesterday by the H.E. Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano, Holy See Permanent Observer at the United Nations Organizations and Bodies for Food and Agriculture (FAO, IFAD, and WFP) at the central headquarters of the FAO, on the theme: *"Taking on the challenge of reaching to the poorest in rural areas". Launch of the FAO Extreme Poverty Framework:*

Intervention of Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano

Madam Deputy Director of the FAO,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I am grateful for the opportunity that I am offered today to reaffirm certain principles that the Holy See considers important for the promotion of rural development and the eradication of extreme poverty, a scourge that cruelly affects many people in the present time. In fact, poverty and the food crisis are still *vexatæ quæstiones* in our times, and continue to afflict the weakest of our planet, cutting short their lives and preventing them from looking to the future in a confident and serene way.

The current situation in which we live is worsening and deteriorating in many contexts: from sub-Saharan Africa to South-east Asia and Latin America. The data published both by the World Bank (Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2018: Piecing Together the Poverty Puzzle, World Bank 2018), and by this Organization that hosts us today (Panorama of rural poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean. Ending poverty in the countryside, FAO

2018), reveal how several factors, which sometimes interweave and complement each other, have noxiously determined the existing reality. These include the deteriorating global economic situation, the worsening of environmental conditions, conflicts that disrupt and cause bloodshed in many countries, and extreme climatic phenomena. These are issues that are analyzed in the document on extreme rural poverty presented today. Pope Francis has also reflected on this, noting with regret that, in many regions of the earth, many of our brothers suffer because “the air is contaminated, natural resources are depleted, the rivers polluted, the soils acidified; they do not have enough water for themselves or for their crops; their sanitary infrastructures are extremely insufficient; their housing is poor and inadequate” (Address at the Opening Ceremony of the 42nd session of the Board of Governors of the International Fund for Agricultural Development – IFAD – 14 February 2019). These are structural conditions that lead to extreme poverty, whose identification can not be reduced, as is unfortunately often done, to a mere economic quantification. An attitude that is due to the reductionist tendency to use only monetary indexes to define problems of greater scope, which, in fact, are closely related to the standard of living, access to study, health protection and adequate nutrition, rights that refer to the dignity of people in a broad sense, to their existential conditions, and should be measured by the Multidimensional Poverty Index (IPM), mentioned in the document that is the object of our attention. The violation of these rights occurs, above all, in rural areas, which are often synonymous with isolation and abandonment.

Faced with such uncomfortable evidence and empirical findings, and taking into account that there are still too many people living in this condition of extreme poverty, how can we deal with this endemic phenomenon?

In proposing its considerations, the Holy See does not intend to replace those who have the duty to make political and economic decisions, but recognizes that “it is necessary to combine the help of the international community, civil society and those who possess resources ... so as to offer real, practical solutions” (Address at the Opening Ceremony of the 42nd session of the Board of Governors of the International Fund for Agricultural Development – IFAD – 14 February 2019). In this sense, it is necessary to act quickly and in a coordinated manner, because only by adding efforts and perspectives, only by collaborating loyally can solutions be identified to face the phenomenon that concerns us, which is global in scope.

Extreme poverty is countered with actions aimed at promoting integral rural development. I say “actions” because mere words, grandiloquent speeches, dossiers and the multiplication of meetings are not enough. It is necessary to take real initiatives to eradicate poverty, to fight against hunger and to promote food sovereignty. It is important to invest in rural regions, to dedicate all kinds of resources to them, also financial, because the exodus from the countryside to the city is a global trend that can not be ignored.

On several occasions Pope Francis, in dialogue with popular movements, has highlighted the importance of favouring the “the three Ts: *Tierra, Techo, Trabajo*” (or “the three Ls: land, lodgings and labour” so that we can have a homeland in which no-one is a slave or excluded.

Land, because only autonomy and food sovereignty can allow local populations living in rural areas to provide for their own sustenance, without being trapped by subsidies and measures imposed from the outside. *Lodgings*, because housing is an inalienable right. Therefore, developing policies that allow people to enjoy a home is necessary to combat the social exclusion of a very large number of people and families who do not have access to a decent life. They are human beings who form a microcosm that is often marginalized, marked by despair, hunger and fear. *Labour*, because decent work is the best means of eradicating poverty and allowing social emancipation. This triad reveals the importance of investing in the expansion of social protection systems and social assistance programs (see Francis, *Address to participants in the world meeting of the Popular Movements*, 28 October 2014; Francis, *Address at the second world meeting of Popular Movements*, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, 9 July 2015).

This meeting can not remain cloistered between these walls, nor its conclusions enclosed in a nice publication and nothing more. Our meeting must become a cry, a powerful incentive to those present here, with significant roles within the States and international organizations, to go out to meet the disadvantaged, to reach out effectively to these people who are not mere numbers, nor simple statistics. They are people who seek and request special attention. Thus, the launching of this corporate framework may be transformed into an additional

opportunity to contribute to the eradication of extreme poverty through the promotion of integral rural development, with a view to improving the living conditions of each individual and of the human family as a whole. Only in this way can we overcome the inhuman globalization, of which Pope Francis often speaks, and which is characterized by indifference to the suffering of others and the decline of the idea of the common good (see Francis, *Message for the 49th World Day of Peace*, 8 December 2015).

I am sure that the launch of this corporate framework will contribute to the best realization of the FAO's motto, "*Fiat panis*", if we can translate intentions and purposes into valid actions, if once and for all commitments become realities that favour national and local policies in support of rural regions, and if our lives clearly reflect that it is possible to reject consumerism and restore solidarity and attention to the weakest as values essential to our conduct. Thank you!
