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Message of the Holy Father Francis on the occasion of International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste 2022

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the Director General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), His Excellency Mr. Qu Dongyu, on the occasion of International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste 2022:

Message

To His Excellency

Mr. Qu Dongyu

Director-General of FAO

Your Excellency:

I cordially greet the participants in the celebration of the International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste. I am grateful for the space given to me at this event which aims to highlight the seriousness of a problem that we cannot afford to ignore in this difficult time we are living in.

When food is not properly utilized, either because it is lost or wasted, we are at the mercy of the "throw-away culture", which is a manifestation of disinterest in what is of fundamental value or attachment to what is unimportant. Knowing that multitudes of human beings do not have access to adequate food or the means to procure it - which is a basic and priority right of every person - seeing food thrown away in the trash or spoiled due to the lack of the necessary resources to get it to its intended recipients is truly shameful and worrying.

The loss and waste of food is truly deplorable as it divides humanity into those who have too much and those who lack the essentials, because it increases inequalities, generates injustice and denies the poor what they need to live in dignity.

The cry of the hungry, deprived in one way or another of their daily bread, must resound in the centres where decisions are made. And it cannot be silenced or stifled by other interests, considering that the latest data from the State of Food and Nutrition Security in the World Report (SOFI 2022) reveals that last year the number of hungry people on our planet increased significantly due to the multiple crises facing humanity. So, let me repeat, we need to favour “gathering in order to redistribute, not production that leads to waste” (Address to Members of the European Food Bank Federation, 18 May 2019). I have said in the past, and I will not tire of insisting, wasting food is wasting people!

The entire international community must mobilize to put an end to the lamentable “paradox of abundance”, which my predecessor St John Paul II denounced with foresight thirty years ago (cf. Address at the opening of the International Conference on Nutrition, 5 December 1992). There is enough food in the world for no one to go to sleep with an empty stomach! More than enough food resources are produced to feed 8 billion people. The issue, however, is one of social justice, that is, the way in which the management of resources and the distribution of wealth are regulated.

Food cannot be subject to speculation. Life depends on it. And it is a scandal that large producers encourage compulsive consumerism in order to enrich themselves, without even considering the real needs of human beings. Food speculation must be stopped! We must stop treating food, which is a fundamental good for everyone, as a bargaining chip for a few.

Moreover, food waste or food loss contributes significantly to the increase of greenhouse gas emissions and thus to climate change and its harmful consequences. The earth we greedily exploit groans because of our consumerist excesses and begs us to stop mistreating and destroying it by reversing the course of our actions. Young people, above all, are crying out for us to think of them, to open our eyes and enlarge our hearts, giving the best of ourselves to care for the common home that came from God's hands and that we must safeguard, responding with good works to the evil we do to it.

We cannot be content with rhetorical exercises in this important matter, which finish with declarations that later fail to be carried out due to forgetfulness, pettiness or greed. It is time to act urgently and for the common good. It is urgent for both states and large multinational companies, for associations and individuals - for everyone, no one excluded - to respond effectively and honestly to the heart-rending cry of the hungry for justice.

Each of us is called upon to consciously and responsibly reorient our lifestyles, so that no one is left behind and everyone gets the food they need, both in quantity and quality. We owe it to our loved ones, to future generations and to those who are stricken by economic and existential misery.

May Almighty God bless their work, for the benefit of all humanity.

From the Vatican, 29 September 2022

FRANCIS
