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Message of the Holy Father for World Food Day

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the director general of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, Mr. Qu Dongyu, on the occasion of World Food Day 2023:

Message of the Holy Father

His Excellency
Mr. Qu Dongyu

Your Excellency,

World Food Day is being celebrated at a time when many of our brothers and sisters are suffering from poverty and discouragement. Indeed, the cries of anguish and despair of the poor should awaken us from the lethargy that grips us, and appeals to our consciences. The condition of hunger and malnutrition that seriously wounds so many human beings is the result of an iniquitous accumulation of injustices and inequalities that leaves many stranded in the gutter of life and allows a few to settle in a state of ostentation and opulence. This applies not only to food, but also to all basic resources, the inaccessibility of which for many people represents an affront to their intrinsic, God-given dignity. It is indeed an insult that should make the whole of humanity ashamed, and mobilize the international community.

In this sense, the theme at the heart of this year's World Water Day reflections, "Water is life, water is food. Leave no one behind", invites us to highlight the irreplaceable value of this resource for all living beings on our planet, from which derives the urgent need to plan and implement its management in a wise, careful and sustainable way, so that everyone can enjoy it to satisfy their substantive needs, and so that adequate human development can also be sustained and promoted, without anyone being excluded.

Water is life because it guarantees survival; however, today this resource is threatened by serious challenges in terms of quantity and quality. In many parts of the world, our brothers and sisters suffer from diseases or die

precisely because of the absence or scarcity of drinking water. Droughts caused by climate change are leaving vast regions barren and wreaking enormous havoc on ecosystems and populations. The arbitrary management of water resources, their distortion and pollution, are particularly damaging to the poor and are a shameful affront to which we cannot remain indifferent. On the contrary, we must urgently recognize that “access to safe drinking water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights” (Encyclical *Laudato si'*, no. 30). It is therefore essential to invest more in infrastructure, in sewage networks, in sanitation and wastewater treatment systems, particularly in the most remote and depressed rural areas. It is also important to develop educational and cultural models that raise society's awareness of the need to respect and preserve this primary asset. Water must never be seen as a mere commodity, a product to be traded or a commodity to be speculated on.

Water is food because it is essential to achieving food security, being a means of production and an indispensable component of agriculture. In crops, there is a need to promote effective programmes to prevent losses in agricultural irrigation pipes; to use organic and inorganic pesticides and fertilizers that do not pollute water; and to encourage measures to safeguard the availability of water resources to prevent acute shortages from becoming a cause of conflict between communities, peoples and nations. Furthermore, science and technological and digital innovation must be placed at the service of a sustainable balance between consumption and available resources, avoiding negative impacts on ecosystems and irreversible damage to the environment. For this reason, international organizations, governments, civil society, business, academic and research institutions, as well as other entities, must join forces and unite ideas so that water is everyone's heritage, is better distributed and is managed in a sustainable and rational way.

Finally, the celebration of *World Food Day* should also serve as a reminder that the throwaway culture must be incisively countered by actions based on responsible and loyal cooperation on the part of everyone. Our world is too interdependent and cannot afford to be divided into blocs of countries that promote their interests in a spurious and biased way. We are called instead to think and act in terms of community, of solidarity, seeking to prioritize the lives of all over the appropriation of goods by the few.

Mr. General Director, regrettably we are witnessing today a scandalous polarization of international relations due to the existing crises and confrontations. Huge financial resources and innovative technologies that could be used to make water a source of life and progress for all are being diverted to arms production and trade. Never before has it been more urgent to become promoters of dialogue and peacemakers. The Church never tires of sowing those values that will build a civilization that finds in love, mutual respect and reciprocal help a compass to guide its steps, turning above all to those brothers and sisters who suffer most, such as the hungry and the thirsty.

With these wishes, as I thank the *Food and Agriculture Organization* of the United Nations for all it does to promote agricultural development, healthy and sufficient nutrition for every person and the sustainable use of water, I invoke abundant heavenly blessings on all those who strive for a better and more fraternal world.

From the Vatican, 16 October 2023

FRANCIS
