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INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE ALLO "SPECIAL EVENT" DELLA F.A.O. SUL DIRITTO UMANO ALL'ALIMENTAZIONE

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L'Em.mo Card. Renato Raffaele Martino, Presidente del Pontificio Consiglio della Giustizia e della Pace, ha preso la parola nel corso dello "Special Event" sull'implementazione del diritto umano all'alimentazione, organizzato dalla F.A.O. il 4 novembre scorso.

Riportiamo qui di seguito il testo dell'intervento pronunciato:

● INTERVENTO DELL'EM.MO CARD. RENATO RAFFAELE MARTINO

1. *Introduction*

Allow me, first of all, to express my gratitude to Mr. Jacques Diouf, the Director General of the United Nations Organization for Food and Agriculture, for his kind invitation to participate in this special event on the *Realization of the Human Right to Food*. It is indeed a pleasure for me to be with you, and to share in this opportunity to come together as concerned members of the human family over the ever present scourge that afflicts so many millions of our brothers and sisters. It is my hope that through our discussions today, we might all leave here with a more firm commitment to building societies, institutions, and organizations that will ensure that there is food enough for all.

2. Poverty is a multidimensional social phenomenon. Definitions of poverty and its causes vary by gender, age, culture, and other social and economic contexts. For example, in both rural and urban areas of the world, men associate poverty with a lack of material assets, whereas for women poverty is defined as food insecurity. Generational differences emerge as well. Younger men in some parts of the world consider the ability to generate an income as the most important asset, whereas older men in other parts of the world consider the status connected to traditional agricultural lifestyles to be most important.

A person's status and location affect perceived causes of poverty. For example, in some areas farmers link poverty to drought; the urban poor link poverty to rising prices and fewer employment opportunities; and the rich link poverty to the deterioration in domestic and international terms of trade, neglect of time-honoured customs

and traditions, a lack of motivation among certain classes and groups of people, price liberalization and devaluation, lack of education, and absence of government. Poverty never results from the lack of one thing, but from many interlocking factors that manifest themselves in the experiences of the poor.

The material aspects of poverty are well known. Hunger and food insecurity remain the core concerns. For poor families, meeting the most basic needs for food, water, and shelter can be a daily struggle; this becomes acute when there is unemployment and underemployment, or lack of productive land or other income-earning assets

Fuelled by the insufficient availability of food, the lack of physical and economic access to food, poor biological absorption, poor health practices and access to potable water, not to mention other political, economic and social factors, the raging scourge of hunger continues to plague millions and millions of men, women, and children throughout the world.

3. On October 19, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI sent a message to Mr. Jacques Diouf on the occasion of World Food Day. In that message, the Pope said:

Very often, international action to combat hunger ignores the human factor, and priority is given instead to technical and socio-economic aspects. Local communities need to be involved in choices and decisions concerning land use, since farmland is being diverted increasingly to other purposes, often with damaging effects on the environment and the long-term viability of the land. If the human person is treated as the protagonist, it becomes clear that the short-term economic gains must be placed within the context of better long-term planning for food security, with regard to both quantity and quality.

While poverty is material in nature, it has psychological effects—such as distress at being unable to feed one's children, or insecurity from not knowing where the next meal will come from, or shame at having to go without food. Frequently, parents relate that they deal with food insecurity by going hungry so that they will not have to see their children starve.

We must continue to seek effective and timely solutions to the plight of people who suffer from hunger. We must work together as a human family, and as a family of nations, so that the starving and those who want for nothing, the very poor and the very rich, those who lack the necessary means, and others who lavishly waste them, no longer live side by side. Such contrasts between poverty and wealth are intolerable for humanity.

The right to have enough to eat is fundamental and inalienable for every person and for their family. It is the task of nations, their leaders, their economic powers, and all people of good will to seek every opportunity for a more equitable sharing of resources which are not lacking, and of consumer goods; for by this sharing, all will express a true solidarity rooted in a knowledge of and appreciation for the dignity of every human person.

4. In order to respond to this pressing need, there is much talk and reflection about how to achieve "food security" for all people. Such a concept must be based on a desire for deeper solutions which flow from profound solidarity among all people. Food security must stress components such as: the production of a sufficient amount of food, a stable supply throughout the year, access to food for all, the proper and equitable distribution, and a commitment to producing the components of a balanced and healthy diet in keeping with local nutritional practices.

Concrete efforts must be made to bring about true agrarian reform. In some countries, for example, 1% of the population controls 50% of the land. A more equitable distribution of land, with the consequent increase in participation in food production, especially by the poor, is an important component of any such solution. In this regard, the right of women to have access to land must also be strongly reaffirmed.

Allow me to share with you several concrete examples of how the Catholic Church throughout the world is engaged in the fight against hunger:

- One initiative that is having a positive impact on women and their role in food security is called the *National Women Farmer's Association* (NAWFA). It has a membership of over 30,000 women sesame farmers supported by Catholic Relief Services' Market-Led Sesame Program in the Gambia. The Market-Led Sesame Program aims to improve household food security for rural families by improving their economic access to goods and services. Through this program, Catholic Relief Services supports activities such as market research dissemination, literacy and handicraft skills training, and agricultural training, all of which have markedly increased women's income.

- The *Dallol Maouri Village Banking Program*, also supported by CRS, provides financial and non-financial services to over 2,500 poor women entrepreneurs in rural areas of southern Niger. Clients are trained in functional literacy and learn basic business, marketing, and accounting practices to better manage their income generating activities.

- CRS/Niger's micro-financing program, which by the end of 2006, will provide savings and credit services to 5,000 clients. In addition, a committee composed of the Catholic Church and local partners is currently working with CRS to ensure that a viable micro finance program is transformed into a sustainable institution.

- Caritas Niger, which, in the midst of the severe drought and famine in that region, began distributing more than 1000 metric tons of emergency food supplies. Some 43,000 people were given emergency food rations in that region.

- *The Food Security Initiative* (FSI), supported by CRS and other Catholic NGOS, which aims to increase food security in 120 villages in the Districts of Tanout and Dogondoutchi in Sudan by teaching new skills in agriculture and gardening, helping to sustain agriculture production, protect the community's natural resource base, and improve capacity building of local organizations.

- Jesuit Relief Services and Caritas in Sri Lanka, which continue to support emergency relief efforts for the hundreds of thousands of people who have fled their homes due to the escalation of violence in northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. Jesuit Relief Services was one of only three humanitarian agencies approved by the Sri Lankan government in August to access and provide relief in government restricted areas within the Batticaloa district. It is an area where access to people in need, and movement of relief supplies, has been severely limited.

These are but a few of the manifold examples of how Catholic institutions and organizations throughout the world have been and continue to be on the ground working at programs to improve household food availability by increasing staple food and livestock production, home gardening, by improving storage facilities and investing in agricultural infrastructures. These same organizations have developed programs aimed at improving household access to food by increasing non-farm income and savings, including micro-financing programs and increased cash crop production. Moreover, they have engaged in projects aimed at improving the individual's ability to utilize food, by supporting health programs for child survival, maternal and child health, and improved sanitation infrastructures, as well as HIV/AIDS education.

On a global scale, sustainable agricultural development must be fostered by encouraging study and development of crops which produce a high yield. It is particularly important that, wherever possible, results of such development be made available to parts of the world where agricultural production is deficient. In addition, economic policies which result in an inadequate distribution of already existing food which is sufficient to feed the world's population cannot be allowed to continue.

If the world is to have sustainable agriculture, the international community must acknowledge that peace is a prior and fundamental condition. Wars not only bring poverty, they also breed famine by forcing massive displacements of peoples and render their land either unsafe or unsuitable for growing food.

As we consider the conditions for food security and sustainable agriculture as means to ending the scourge of hunger, we must admit that in our day there exists what the late Pope John Paul II once called "structures of

famine," which can only be overcome with an attitude of solidarity touching on every aspect of development: formation and use of capital, investments, surpluses, and production and distribution systems. Each phase has an underlying moral and ethical dimension. Indeed, economic policies themselves cannot be separated from ethical consideration.

5. Here also we find once again the demand for the universal destination of goods. The social lien on the right to private property was thereby regularly expressed in public law in order to make up for the individual failures to comply with this demand. These failures include: the excessive desire for wealth, ill-gotten profits and so many other ways of exercising ownership, possession, and knowledge, along with the denial of the fact that created goods must always serve everyone equitably.

All people of good will are capable of perceiving the ethical issues that are at stake and that are linked to the future of the world economy: combating hunger and malnutrition, contributing to food security and the endogenous agricultural development of developing countries, developing these countries' export potential and preserving the natural resources of planet-wide relevance.

The Church's social teaching views all these as constituent components of the universal common good, which must be identified and fostered by the developed countries. These components must also stand as the essential objective of international economic organizations and as the challenge facing the globalization of trade. This universal common good, once it has been recognized, should be the inspiration for strengthening the legal, institutional and political framework governing international trade. This will demand courage on the part of the leaders of social, governmental and trade union institutions, since it is today so difficult to set the interests of each individual within a consistent vision of the common good.

6. *Conclusion*

Today more than ever, in the face of recurring crises and the pursuit of narrow self interest, there must be cooperation and solidarity between States, each of which should be attentive to the needs of its weakest citizens, who are the first to suffer from poverty. Without this solidarity, there is a risk of limiting or even impeding the world of international organizations that set out to fight hunger and malnutrition.

Finally, again in the words of the late John Paul II, "Individuals and whole peoples will finally be judged by history in relation to how they actually fulfil their obligation to contribute to the good of their fellow human beings...It is to be hoped that everyone—individuals, groups, private undertakings and public bodies—will take proper care of the most needy, beginning with the basic right to satisfy one's own hunger" (Pope John Paul II, 10 Nov. 1985). Thank you.

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