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Letter from the Cardinal Secretary of State on behalf of the Holy Father to the Tenth Forum for the Future of Agriculture (Brussels, 28 March 2017)

The following is the letter sent by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin on behalf of the Holy Father Francis to the Tenth Forum for the Future of Agriculture, taking place today, 28 March 2017, in Brussels, Belgium.

*To Mr Janez Potočnik
President of the Forum for the Future of Agriculture*

The work of the Tenth Forum for the Future of Agriculture affords His Holiness Pope Francis the opportunity to express his encouragement to all those who, with their different duties and responsibilities, are called to offer solutions to the needs of the agricultural sector in all its various elements.

A cursory look at the world situation is sufficient to show the need for greater commitment to supporting agricultural activity. This would entail not only improving systems of production and commerce, but also, and primarily, emphasizing the right of every human being to healthy and sufficient nourishment, in accordance with individual needs, and an integral role in the implementation of decisions and strategies. It is increasingly clear that at the heart of all activity must be the person, whether he or she be an agricultural worker, an economic agent or a consumer. Such an approach, if viewed as a shared goal and not simply a technical question, will allow greater consideration to be given to the close relationship between agriculture, the care and protection of creation, economic growth, levels of development, and the present and future needs of the world population.

The expectations linked to the *Sustainable Development Goals* set for the entire international community require facing the situation of some countries and regions where agricultural activity remains deficient, because insufficiently diversified and consequently incapable of responding to the local environment and climate change. At present we are witnessing low levels of employment and therefore of overall earnings, as well as malnutrition, at times chronic, affecting millions of human beings. This is a complex mechanism, striking above all the most vulnerable sectors. These are not only excluded from processes of production, but are also frequently forced to leave their lands and to seek refuge in search of a better life.

This is not to say that the future of agriculture lies in the imposition of a model of production that greatly benefits

limited groups and a tiny portion of the world's population. Nor does it mean viewing agricultural work on the basis of laboratory findings. Those approaches may bring immediate benefits to some, yet have we adequately considered the harm they can do to others? Every effort should be directed primarily to helping each country increase its own resources in order to achieve alimentary self-sufficiency. This will involve contemplating new models of development and consumption, facilitating forms of community structures that value small producers and that protect local ecosystems and biodiversity (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 129, 180). It will also mean adopting policies of cooperation that do not aggravate the situation of less developed peoples and their dependence on others.

The distance between the enormity of the problems and the positive results obtained to date must never be a reason for discouragement or diffidence, but rather an incentive to greater responsibility. Through the dialogue promoted by the Forum over which you preside, may each participant be inspired to intensify the work already begun and to make it ever more creative and better organized. "Truly, much can be done!" (*ibid.*, 180).

In the name of Pope Francis, I express the hope that this meeting will prove most fruitful. To you and to all taking part I offer my own cordial best wishes.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin
Secretary of State
