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Audience with Members of the European Food Banks Federation

At 11.00 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the European Food Banks Federation, at the end of their annual meeting in Rome, this year celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Italian Food Bank.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Friends,

After having heard what your President said, I felt the temptation not to speak, because he spoke like a Holy Father! Thank you, because I understood that what you said were words from the heart. Thank you!

I greet you warmly, and through you I would like to greet all the members and volunteers of the Food Banks of Europe. I am happy to welcome you at the conclusion of your annual meeting held here in Rome on the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Food Bank of Italy: congratulations on your anniversary!

I would like to thank you for what you do: providing food to those who are hungry. This does not mean merely offering benefits but rather providing an initial tangible gesture of accompaniment on the path of liberation. When I look at you, I can visualize the commitment of so many people who work quietly without reward, offering so much help. It is always easy to *speak* about others; it is much harder to *give* to others, and yet this is what matters. You get involved not with words, but with real life, because you are fighting against food wastage, salvaging what would have gone to waste. You take what is thrown into the vicious cycle of waste and insert it into the "virtuous circle" of good use. Your work is like that of trees – this is the image that comes to mind – which breathe in pollution but give back oxygen. And like trees, you do not keep the oxygen: you distribute the quantity required for living so that it reaches those in need.

Fighting against the terrible scourge of hunger means also fighting waste. Waste reveals an indifference towards things and towards those who go without. Wastefulness is the crudest form of discarding. I think of the moment when Jesus, after the distribution of the loaves to the crowd, asks for the scraps to be gathered up, so that nothing would go to waste (cf. *Jn 6:12*). Gathering in order to redistribute; not production that leads to waste. To throw food away means to throw people away. It is scandalous today not to notice how precious food is as a good, and how so much good ends up so badly.

Wasting what is good is a nasty habit that can insinuate itself anywhere, even in charitable works. At times, good initiatives guided by the best intentions can get frustrated by extended bureaucracy, excessive administrative costs, or become forms of welfare that do not lead to authentic development. In today's complex world it is important that *good is done well*, and that it is not the fruit of improvisation; it requires intelligence, the capacity for planning and continuity. It needs an integrated vision, of persons who stand together: it is difficult to do good while not caring for each other. In this sense, your experiences, even recent ones, take us back to the roots of solidarity in Europe; for they seek unity within concrete goodness. It is good to see languages, beliefs, traditions and different approaches converging, not for self-interest, but rather to give dignity to others. The work you do, without many words, sends a clear message: it is not by seeking our own advantage that we build the future; the progress of all advances each time we walk with those who are left behind.

The economy has a profound need of this. Everything is connected and rapid today, but the frenetic scramble for money is accompanied by an interior frailty that is ever more acute, and by an increasingly evident disorientation and loss of meaning. What I care about is an economy that is more humane, that has a soul, and not a reckless machine that crushes human beings. Too many people today are without work, dignity or hope; and still others are oppressed by inhuman demands of production that empty human relations and have a negative impact on both family and personal life. Sometimes, when I exercise the ministry of Confession, there are young people who have children, and I ask them: "Do you play with your children?" And many times the answer is: "Father, I don't have time... When I leave home to go to work they are still asleep, and when I return home they are already in bed". This is inhuman: this vertigo of inhuman work. The economy that was established to "look after the home", has become dehumanized; instead of serving humanity, it enslaves us, subjugates us to monetary mechanisms that are ever more distant from real life and increasingly difficult to control. Financial mechanisms are "liquid", they are "gaseous", they have no consistency. How can we live comfortably when human persons are being reduced to numbers, when statistics replace human faces, when lives depend on stock markets?

What can we do? Faced with an economic situation that is ailing, we cannot intervene with brute force and risk causing death. Yet we must find a cure: not by creating instability or dreaming of the past, but rather supporting what is good and taking up paths of solidarity, being constructive. We must come together to relaunch what is good, knowing full well that, even if evil is at large in the world, with God's help and the good will of so many like yourselves, the world can be a better place. We need to support those who wish to change things for the better; we need to encourage models of growth based on social equality, on the dignity of human persons, on families, on the future of young people, on respect for the environment. A circular economy is no longer something we can put off. Waste cannot be the last word bequeathed to posterity by the well-off few, while the majority of humanity remains silent.

With these expressions of concern and hope that I wanted to share with you, I extend to you once more my gratitude and I encourage you to go forward, involving everyone you meet, especially the youth, so that they can join you in promoting the good, to the advantage of all.

Thank you!
