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INTERVENTO DELLA SANTA SEDE ALLA 32A SESSIONE DELLA CONFERENZA DELLA FAO (ROMA, 29 NOVEMBRE-10 DICEMBRE 2003)

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Dal 29 novembre al 10 dicembre 2003 si tiene a Roma la 32a Sessione della Conferenza della dell'Organizzazione delle Nazioni Unite per l'Alimentazione e l'Agricoltura (F.A.O.).

Pubblichiamo qui di seguito il testo dell'intervento di Mons. Renato Volante, Osservatore Permanente e Capo della Delegazione della Santa Sede, pronunciato il 3 dicembre 2003:

• INTERVENTO DI MONS. VOLANTE

Mr. Chairman,

Mr. Director General,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

1. First of all, I wish to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the floor, and allow me to greet all Heads of Delegation and Members of Delegations present in Rome on the occasion of this Session of the Conference.

Our special greetings go to the new member States whose admission shows how the universality of FAO is already a reality. We may well say that the human family as a whole is represented here, with its desire and its expectation to see every single human being free from hunger and malnutrition, as stated in the Preamble of the Constitution of our Organization. The Delegation of the Holy See, with this intervention, wishes, first of all, to reaffirm its appreciation for the valuable action that FAO devotes in favour of the agricultural and food development. And it wants to do so in its special position as Permanent Observer to FAO, as specifically decided by the Conference fifty-five years ago. A position that allows the Holy See to follow continuously the Organization's activities and that of its bodies, and furthermore to propose some reflections in harmony with an ethical perspective, perspective reminding each of us the centrality of the human person, at whose heart good, love and generosity are always stronger than evil, egotism and greed

By doing so, we want to encourage the stakeholders' commitment – governments, organisations of the civil society and individuals – and to support the efforts made to date for an "appropriate and sustainable" management of the natural resources of the Creation, in view of that auspicious food security, which should be up to the dignity of human beings, in every part of our planet.

2. The current debate on what has been realised in the past biennium in relation with the *Programme of Work* of the Organization, besides a general evaluation, shows the effectiveness of the task constantly performed by FAO and by its member States, donors or beneficiaries likewise.

It also shows how important are the choices that will have to be made with future programmes, not only in relation to the different sectors – agriculture, forestry and fisheries –, but particularly in view of the main objective, not to be omitted: that is world food security. Only a decision, that will permit FAO to operate with wise management, but also with the availability of the required resources, will be able to confirm what derives from the commitments approved by all Countries in 1996 on the occasion of the *World Food Summit* and confirmed during the recent sessions of different bodies of the Organization.

The Holy See Delegation is firmly convinced that hunger and malnutrition not only prevent people from full development, but also constitute an evident denial of their fundamental rights, those rights stated and asserted in various international instruments and declarations. The same rights also voiced, in different forms, within the Countries. And only an *authentic solidarity*, achieved through proportional contributions to budget resources, will make it possible to look ahead with better reliance.

We are all, more and more, aware that food and agricultural resources, are they the outcome of activities in the fields, in the forestry sector, in the sea or in inland waters, represent an important contribution, not only in relation to food to be allocated in form of aid and assistance, either for emergencies or in an extended way, but also to determine the overall producing power of a Country. As a matter of fact, agriculture, animal production and fisheries and their resources determine the conditions of employment and economic development, besides contributing on those products essential to the nutritional needs of people (cf. *World Food Summit, Plan of Action*, Commitment III). In this respect, the Delegation of the Holy See heartily wishes, because of the global vision of attention that the Church pays to the poorest and the weakest, that it would be possible to provide, in adequate form, assistance to all artisanal activities and practices which are in fact the basic economic reality for most of the developing Countries that have in their monoculture production, in their forestry resources or in the exploitation of fishery resources or in their aquaculture activities an essential and regrettably often unique reference. In this regard I wish to recall the importance of all forms of encouragement and support in the sector of small farms or artisanal fishing, that FAO propose to undertake or to keep in its programmes related to intervention. This is a priority target towards which the Catholic Church pays all her attention and to which she wishes to add her readiness to collaborate, by using her forces and her structures, as well as her experience in the various forms of associations between farmers, fishermen, artisans engaged in soil works and stocking of the resulting production.

3. The agenda of the Conference offers another hint that calls at once the attention of those who want to combine the international action of assistance and aid with a reliable policy of co-operation, aiming to a complete growth of the various Countries, of the communities and finally of the people. I am referring to the first evaluations of the acceptance and subsequent enforcement of *National Plans on Food Security*, that precisely the last session of the Conference has designated as the essential instruments to ensure a real sense of responsibility of management of those countries that, laudably, work to secure an adequate level of food security to their populations. Obviously the *National Plans* are a direct consequence of the "Final Declaration: International Alliance against Hunger", adopted in 2002 at the conclusion of the *World Food Summit – Five Years Later*. But, as the initial design of these Plans shows, they do not represent only the consequence of a formal political commitment, around which the consensus of the States was reached. These *Plans* are to be considered in their right dimension of ruling instruments, hence of practical implementation. They take into account some fundamental principles, which have developed in the present International Community and FAO is engaged to fit within its specific field of competence and aims. In particular, for the Delegation of the Holy See, the reference to a generic sustainability does not seem to be sufficient, if it is not related to that *human and universal sustainability* (cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 37; Paul VI, Encyclical Letter

Populorum Progressio, 17) from which it is possible to secure, first of all, the participation of the rural populations in the *Plans* formulation and in their implementation, in compliance with the categoric imperative of development requirements of the individuals and of the communities. It seems to us that this approach can contribute to a real assumption of responsibility towards future generations.

It seems to us also that in the implementation of the *Declaration* the first problem is the *sustainable use of agro-food resources*, which on a world-wide scale are in a quantity definitely higher than the actual needs required by the present world population. Furthermore the target to be achieved to half the number of peoples who need adequate nutrition level – which does now seem to be farer – should not imply any lack of attention towards the remaining fifty percent of the hungry and the undernourished people who deserve, and I would say, do have a natural right to be considered and assisted. The question then shifts into the domain of willingness and of political responsibility. The concept of responsibility, which is the basis of the *Final Declaration of the World Food Summit – Five Years Later*, is present in the different aspects of the sectors of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, keeping particularly into account questions connected with environment and management of resources. These are areas in which there are rules that FAO puts as a basis of its action. This reference goes, first of all, to the rules on the environmental matters established by UNCED in Rio and, with regard to the obligations committing the Countries, reiterated at the *World Summit on Sustainable Development* in 2002. Their binding force consists today not only in formal acts, but in the action carried out by intergovernmental Institutions, like FAO, that indicate a real progress towards that «*greater degree of international ordering*» (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 43) wished by the Catholic Church. The sustainability, in fact, cannot be seen only on account of the safeguarding resources, but mainly in the relationship between the use of resources and their reconstitution, specifying responsibly the difference between the resources not immediately renewable (whose systematic and bulky use damages the agricultural, forest and water ecosystems) and those which are renewable. The reference goes at once to the activities causing damages in an irreparable way, to the biodiversity, reducing the multiplicity of species, and then modifying or limiting both the diet of an entire population and the commercial activity based on agriculture and fishery. In this context, we can only wish a rapid conclusion of the formulation work of the appropriate "guidelines on sustainability indicators" for the various sectors. This can be done, perhaps, by increasing a particular consideration for the regional and sub-regional diversities and by introducing a higher level of reliable connection between the food security target, the poverty eradication with the resulting development and the protection of the different ecosystems. It becomes necessary, even in this case – so it seems to us – to answer to that fundamental principle stated by the International Community to be at the head of each ruling and operating intervention in the field of sustainability: «*Human beings are at centre of concerns for sustainable development*» (*Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, Principle 1). The responsibility concerns, then, the position that every single Country is invited to take to put into operation the content of the *Declaration* of the WFS – Fyl, especially in those provisions concerning the strategies required to face the causes of food insecurity, brought about by human activities: internal and international conflicts, forced people displacements, discrimination against religious and ethnic identities in minority status, just to say a few. The absence of even a small form of regulation in this field may well exclude, from the production mechanisms and from the nutritional intake as well, those countries that do not have the possibility to exercise a proper supervision over their resources. The responsibility, in this case, cannot be limited to propose control systems, even if essential, as these control systems, even if they are strict and efficient, are not enough to give concrete solutions. Therefore, an ethical choice becomes imperative, to bind the Countries to accept the principle of a fair sharing of the Creation resources. Evidently through specific norms related to their own behaviour and their mutual relations. And here we can speak about the fulfilment "in good faith" of the engagement assumed by the States in exercising their responsibility towards those living in their territory and towards the entire human family.

Mr. Chairman,

4. In this level of regulated action that FAO has to carry out, we must include also the measures in the field of trade of agricultural, forestry and fishery products. They represent an essential nutritional component and therefore they remain linked to the negotiations' round in view of revising the multilateral regulations on agricultural trade. The activity of FAO and its preoccupation for agricultural development – I refer particularly to the strengthening of the production and therefore to trading – indicates to the countries how necessary is to work in the right direction in the field of trade negotiation, especially to foresee or, at least to offer, a first ruling on

some essential aspects. Among these, the exploitation of resources, the management of the production, the processing and trading and the support given in this direction by the major producing Countries.

Anyway we must evaluate, more and more, the positive data of food crop increase that is put into the international market by developing Countries. For many of them these food crops are the only source of currency income, besides being, of course, source of income and economic activity of their own population.

On the relationship between production and trade we have to include an extended evaluation of the new biotechnologies, with the most recent developments used for cultivation, mostly through techniques and processes applied to the selection and to the variety of plants, as well as to the animal production and, with reference to the fishery sector, to the increasing development of aquaculture.

In this field we may also consider the debate related to *food safety* of the agro-food products which envisages not only a prevention in the production phase – usually called *risks assessment* on the nature and severity of hazards – but also a *risk management*, by a stronger control on specific *natural hazards* and *anthropogenic contaminants*, to guarantee a concrete safeguard to human health. It seems therefore noteworthy, the fact that *National Plans on Food Security*, in proposing among their guidelines the *precautionary approach*, do not lay down discriminatory prejudicial in connection with resources or with working techniques coming from the new biotechnologies, but rather request spreading of information and know-how to avoid any kind of uncontrolled risk.

These are indications, becoming even more pertinent, if we think to a not sufficient - or quite lacking – adequate co-ordination between the regulation standards of the various Countries in this subject, a condition which should be essential to determine a *precautionary approach* whose absence do not help to reach the essential target "*safety and quality*" of the agro-food crops, as an expression of a balanced relationship between the order of the Creation and human's activities (cf. John Paul II, *Speech on the occasion of the Jubilee of Agricultural World*, 11 November 2000, 4).

Mr. Chairman,

These are some considerations offered by the Holy See Delegation on the occasion of the 32nd session of the FAO Conference, driven only by its desire to contribute, in a perspective essentially ethical, to the formulation of complex decisions of political, technical, economic and financial nature that will have to be taken both in relation to the activity of FAO and to the broadest intergovernmental activities in the field of agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

Our wish is that all decisions and consequent actions keep in mind the principle of *international solidarity*, fundamental for a peaceful coexistence between peoples and nations, that is real safeguard of the inalienable *right to a full development* of each one and all of us.

Thank you.

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