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Pope's Message on World Food Day

The opening celebrations began today for World Food Day, instituted by the FAO on 16 October 1945, when 42 countries gathered in Quebec, Canada to found the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation with the aim of freeing humanity from hunger and malnutrition, and effectively administering world food systems. From then, every year on 16 October, 150 countries from all over the world mark the occasion with different events aiming to raise awareness of hunger and the need to guarantee safe food and a nutritious diet to all.

Every year the Holy Father participates in the event, which this year took the theme "Climate is changing. Food and agriculture must too", with a message to the Director General, José Graziano da Silva, read this morning by Msgr. Fernanda Chica Arellano, Holy See Permanent Observer at the FAO, based in Rome, for the World Food Day inaugural ceremony. The following is the full text of the message.

Illustrious Sir,

1. The fact that the FAO has chosen to devote today's World Food Day to the theme "Climate is changing. Food and agriculture must too", leads us to consider the struggle against hunger as an even more difficult objective to attain in the presence of a complex phenomenon such as climate change. With regard to facing the challenges that nature poses to man, and that man poses to nature (cf. Enc. *Laudato si'*, 25), I would like to submit some reflections to the consideration of the FAO, its Member States and those who participate in its activity.

What is the cause of the current climate change? We must question our individual and collective responsibilities, without resorting to the facile sophistry that hides behind statistical data or conflicting predictions. This does not mean abandoning the scientific data we need more than ever, but rather going beyond merely interpreting the phenomenon or recording its many effects.

Our condition as people who are necessarily in relation to one another, and our responsibility as the guardians of creation and its order, require us to retrace the causes of the current changes and to go to their root. First and foremost, we must admit that the many negative effects on the climate derive from the daily behaviour of people,

communities, populations and States. If we are aware of this, a mere evaluation in ethical and moral terms is not sufficient. It is necessary to act politically and therefore to make the necessary decisions, to discourage or promote certain behaviours and lifestyles, for the sake of the new generations and those to come. Only in this way can we preserve the planet.

The responses to be put into effect must be suitably planned, and cannot be the fruit of emotion or fleeting motives. It is important to plan them. In this task, an essential role is played by the institutions called upon to work together, inasmuch as the action of individuals, while necessary, becomes effective only if framed in a network made up of people, public and private bodies, and national and international apparatuses. This network, however, cannot remain anonymous; this network is fraternity, and must act on the basis of its fundamental solidarity.

2. Those who are engaged in work in the fields, in farming, in small-scale fishing, or in the forests, or those who live in rural areas in direct contact with the effects of climate change, are aware that if the climate changes, their life changes too. Their daily lives are affected by difficult or at times dramatic situations, the future becomes increasingly uncertain and in this way the thought of abandoning homes and loved ones begins to arise. There is a prevalent sense of abandonment, the feeling of being abandoned by institutions, deprived of possible technical contributions or even of just consideration on the part of all those of us who benefit from their work.

From the wisdom of rural communities we can learn a style of life that can help defend us from the logic of consumerism and production at any cost, a logic that, cloaked in good justifications, such as the increasing population, is in reality aimed solely at the increase of profit. In the sector in which the FAO works, there is a growing number of people who believe they are omnipotent, or able to ignore the cycles of the seasons and to improperly modify the various animal and plant species, leading to the loss of variety that, if it exists in nature, has and must have its role. Producing qualities that may give excellent results in the laboratory may be advantageous for some, but have ruinous effects for others. And the principle of caution is not enough, as very often it is limited to not allowing something to be done, whereas there is a need to act in a balanced and honest way. Genetic selection of a quality of plant may produce impressive results in terms of yield, but have we considered the terrain that loses its productive capacity, farmers who no longer have pasture for their livestock, and water resources that become unusable? And above all, do we ask if and to what extent we contribute to altering the climate?

Not precaution, then, but wisdom: what peasants, fisherman and farmers conserve in memory handed down through the generations and which is now derided and forgotten by a model of production that is entirely to the advantage of a limited group and a tiny portion of the world population. Let us remember that it is a model which, despite all its science, allows around eight hundred million people to continue to go hungry.

3. The issue is directly reflected in the emergencies that intergovernmental institutions such as the FAO are called upon to confront and manage on a daily basis, well aware that climate changes do not belong exclusively to the sphere of meteorology. How can we forget that climate contributes to making human mobility unstoppable? The most recent data tell us that there is increasing migration for climatic reasons, swelling the numbers of that convoy of the least, the excluded, those who are denied a role in the great human family. A role that cannot be granted by a State or by a status, but which belongs to every human being by virtue of being a person, with his or her dignity and rights.

It is not enough to be upset or moved by those who, at every latitude, ask for their daily bread. Decisions and action are needed. Very often, also as the Catholic Church, we have reiterated that the level of world production is sufficient to ensure food for all, provided that distribution is equitable. But can we still continue along this line, if market logic follows other routes, to the point of making food products a commodity like any other, to use produce increasingly for non-food uses, or to destroy food for the simple fact that there is excess in relation to profit and not to need? Indeed, we know that the mechanism of distribution remains theoretical if the hungry do not have effective access to foodstuffs, and if they continue to depend upon more or less conditional external support, if the correct relationship is not established between need and consumption, and not least, if waste is not eliminated and food loss is not reduced.

We are all required to cooperate in this change of course: political decision-makers, producers, those who work the land, fisheries and forests, and every citizen. Certainly, each one with his or her different responsibilities, but all in the same role of constructors of an internal order within nations and an international order that no longer permits that development be the prerogative of the few, nor that the goods of creation be the patrimony of the powerful. There is no lack of possibilities or positive examples and good practices that make available to us the experiences that can be followed, shared and spread.

4. The wish to act cannot depend upon the advantages that may derive from it, but is instead a requirement linked to the needs that are manifest in the lives of people and of the entire human family. Material and spiritual needs, but in any case real, not the fruit of the decisions of the few, of the fashions of the moment or models of life that make the person an object, human life a tool, even for experimentation, and the production of food a mere economic affair, to which it is possible to sacrifice even the food that is available, destined by its nature to ensure that every person may have a sufficient quantity of healthy food every day.

We are now close to the new phase that in Marrakech will call all States Parties to the Convention on climate change to give effect to these commitments. I echo the desire of many in expressing my hope that the objectives outlined by the Paris Agreement do not remain simply as good words, but rather that they are transformed into courageous decisions able to make solidarity not only a virtue but also a working model in economics, and fraternity no longer an aspiration but a criterion for domestic and international governance.

These, Mr. Director General, are some reflections I wish to extend to you at this moment, in which there are concerns, trepidations and tensions caused also by the climate question which is increasingly present in our daily lives and has an impact on the living conditions of so many of our brothers and sisters, including the most vulnerable and marginalised. May the Almighty bless your efforts in the service of humanity as a whole.
