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Intervention by the Holy See Permanent Observer at the FAO at the 31st Regional Conference of the FAO in Europe in Voronezh, Russian Federation

The following is the intervention given this morning by the Holy See Permanent Observer at the FAO, Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano, at the 31st Regional Conference of the FAO in Europe, taking place from 16 to 18 May in Voronezh, Russian Federation:

Intervention of Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano

Mr. President,

1. I thank you for allowing me to speak, and I would like to thank the Government of the Russian Federation for the welcome and support you have given to this meeting. I also thank the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia for everything it has done to facilitate our work, providing the necessary elements to understand the agricultural and nutritional situation in the area and also indicating its problems, which are not always easy to confront. I refer, in particular, to those situations in which natural factors and causes are intertwined with the need to make decisions that require an additional effort of solidarity.

The policies that have been implemented in some areas and at various levels are still the only guarantee to achieve and maintain the food security that is essential for the Region. Although there are clear positive signs that demonstrate the effectiveness of strategies to promote rural development and address climate change, as well as the various initiatives put in place to guarantee that the poorest populations can access the market, in the immediate future we are called to respond to the needs related to the achievement of the objectives foreseen by the *Agenda 2030*. To do this, it is vital to redouble the commitment, because it is not only a matter of listing suggestions, but, above all, of programming a truly sustainable future.

2. The Delegation of the Holy See wishes to contribute to the objectives of this Conference by referring to the agenda of its work, maintaining its line of interest also in technical solutions, but highlighting the human component. True cooperation, in fact, must be conceived and structured while keeping in mind the reality of the

people and populations involved, trying to understand the roots of their vulnerability and decisively facing their real demands. Pope Francis recalled this on his visit to FAO on October 16: "It is ... urgent to find new avenues, to transform the possibilities available to us into a guarantee that allows each person to look to the future with well-founded trust and not just with some wish" (*Address at the FAO headquarters on the occasion of World Food Day, 16 October 2017, 1*).

The data related to the Region show how in some areas the damage caused by climate changes is already evident, highlighting phenomena that sorely test the social and economic system, the fragility of some populations manifested in the production levels of the agricultural sector, as well as basic needs of food and resources. If we add the effects of a changing economic situation or inadequate interest with respect to existing problems, it is clear that we must think also of the need and urgency to strengthen the resilience of the populations.

There is, therefore, no time to lose. Solemn words and declarations must be followed by incisive actions and effective and coordinated initiatives. In this direction, we can and must rely on scientific and technical knowledge to deal with problems related to lack of water, but we must also unrestrictedly support the implementation of instruments such as the Paris Agreement, knowing that to do so requires concrete commitment and not just goodwill. Neglecting or even definitively modifying the delicate balances of ecosystems such as agriculture, fisheries and forest resources can become a path of no return that makes it even harder to sustain efforts to help marginalized people.

The Holy See is here with you to support any concrete effort and to help achieve short and long term results, so as to avoid the multiplication of negative elements and improve the capacity for reaction of people and communities to maintain employment in rural areas, the exchange of information, a careful cultivation and living standards that are not only sufficient, but which genuinely respond to the needs of each person. We can not make the mistake, as Pope Francis recalled in FAO, of resigning ourselves to saying "someone else will take care of it" (*Address at the FAO headquarters on the occasion of World Food Day, 16 October 2017, 2*).

However, with a view to the future, the centrality of economic activity in agriculture will be effective if its contribution can cooperate for a truly sustainable development. Various factors further complicate matters, since strategies are often formulated to favour some sectors rather than to provide a unitary vision of development, one that places the demands of the person in the centre. The Holy See is convinced that the lack of attention to this orientation could limit the results that can be expected.

3. The demands of the rural world are linked today two main issues and in certain novel aspects with regard to development strategies. First of all, the protection of agricultural and forest ecosystems, conditioned by climate variability and changes, to which alluvial phenomena or rapid desertification are linked, which also affect areas and populations hitherto immune to such incidents. The causes of these situations are often known and the remedies may be glimpsed, but involvement in more immediate issues means that an appropriate intervention is postponed.

Then we must also consider the growing role of new farming techniques and the support they receive. It is not a question of opposing the results achieved by scientific and technological research with an attitude of rejection towards innovative or perhaps more consistent production systems, but rather of establishing an orderly balance of the said systems and the adequate prevention of risks that may cause suffering to people or ecosystems. This means that research should be directed above all towards strengthen agricultural production due to the increasing demand for food, but without forgetting that the priority of the use of food, as the word itself indicates, is as food. This will also make it possible to recognize the sustainability of agricultural production and the protection of the environment and, consequently, to give the concept of agro-ecology a concrete and possible meaning.

4. Mr. President, it is gratifying to see that the proposed strategies emphasize attention to the family farming sector and its function as an economic subject. But this should not make us overlook the fact that the rural family, in addition to its direct participation in processes and possible decision-making, must also be considered

in its natural reality as the custodian of values, of the meaning of solidarity and of love towards the weakest, and at the same time as guarantor of production methods that respond to the characteristics of the territory and ecosystems. If we were able to transform our societies into large families, devoid of selfishness and full of love, the problems linked to food security would be more manageable or perhaps they would not exist. Such attention to the family and its centrality in rural areas, often far from institutional centres, could be decisive for a greater commitment to enable FAO to be that structure for collecting, studying and disseminating data on agriculture and production techniques, as required by your Constitutional Charter.

On behalf of you, my Delegation wishes once again to reaffirm the willingness of the Catholic Church, and her well-known structures and forms of organization, to contribute to this effort, so that we may all be aware that the objective of food security in the era of globalization, “has become a requirement for safeguarding the peace and stability of the planet” (Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, 27).
