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Intervention of the Holy See Permanent Observer at the FAO at the Conclusion of the Conference “Ensuring socially, environmentally and commercially sustainable fisheries”

The following is the intervention that Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano, Holy See Permanent Observer at the United Nations Organizations and Bodies for Food and Agriculture (FAO., IFAD., WFP.), pronounced yesterday at the end of the Conference “Ensuring socially, environmentally and commercially sustainable fisheries”, held as part of the 33rd Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the FAO, taking place from 9 to 13 July 2018 in Rome:

Intervention by Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano

Mr. Deputy Director General,
Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives,
Officials of FAO,
Illustrious Rapporteurs,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to have this opportunity to offer the concluding remarks to this meeting. A special word of appreciation and gratitude goes to the co-organizers of this conference, in particular, the Netherlands, the European Commission and the European social partners in the fisheries sector. Along with these Delegations, the Holy See has wished to support this moment of reflection to promote the objective of sustainable fishing to meet the demands of people, but also to confirm that the many institutions of the Catholic Church throughout the world are committed to developing and carrying out various initiatives to contribute to this effort.

We must acknowledge the impressive efforts that FAO is carrying out in this sector; it is serious and qualified work that everyone appreciates and that makes the Organization a central structure within the United Nations system for the sound management of the problems of fisheries and fishermen.

In a special way, I wish to thank today’s speakers who, with their remarkable experience, have given added

importance to this event within the framework of the FAO Committee on Fisheries. The speakers pointed out that fishing provides jobs for millions of people and thus allows the sustenance of families, groups and communities, as well as constituting for many countries a source of income and the primary supply of food. We must never forget, however, that the economic dimension, with all its benefits, should never overshadow the indispensable human dimension, which is also vital to guarantee a development compatible with the safeguarding of the environment, for the benefit of present and future generations.

The promotion of sustainable and responsible fishing must be a fundamental concern for national and international activity. This is what Pope Francis said in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, reminding us that: "*Oceans not only contain most of the water on the planet, but also most of the vast variety of living beings, many of them still unknown to us and threatened by various causes. On the other hand, life in rivers, lakes, seas and oceans, which feeds a large part of the world population, is affected by the lack of control in the extraction of fishery resources, which causes drastic declines in some species. Non-selective forms of fishing that waste a large part of the catch are still being used. Especially threatened are marine organisms that we do not take into account, such as certain forms of plankton that constitute a very important component in the marine food chain, and on which depend, ultimately, species that we use to feed ourselves*" (n. 40). It is a broad and effective vision, which can be very well linked with the perspectives expressed in the FAO *Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries*, when it is stated that "*fisheries, including aquaculture, provide a vital source of food, employment, recreation, trade and economic well being for people throughout the world, both for present and future generations and should therefore be carried out responsibly*" (Introduction).

Unfortunately, and notwithstanding some of the important achievements accomplished, in many parts of the world exploitation has reached unsustainable levels. Since effective measures still have yet to be taken in this regard, there remains the risk that the situation will deteriorate even further. It is imperative, therefore, that we rediscover the wisdom that allows us to consider fishing as an important and precious resource for the future of the human family. That said, we know all too well that the road towards this goal will not be easy.

To solve the situations linked to excessive exploitation of fish resources and the lack of coordination in the area, it is necessary to implement the various provisions contained in the numerous conventions that regulate the fishing sector. Some speakers have underlined this in their speeches, and I think we could summarize the content of them by saying that we all carry in our hearts the human dimension of fishing activity. However, and sadly, we are also very aware of reports related to the exploitation of fishermen, whose work is often precarious, in many cases forced, where some have even become victims of human trafficking. Such knowledge should make us reflect upon the activities of our governments, intergovernmental organizations or civil society organizations.

What can we do or who should do it? This is the question that we have to answer conscientiously, in an effective and tangible way. We must not remain in the theoretical, nor speak in rhetoric. It is time to act.

At the same time that the industrial activity of fish processing and conservation is steadily increasing, atypical forms of hiring are also on the rise, with irregular and illicit employment, lacking due stability and, not rarely, without the minimum social guarantees. There are workers in the fishing sector who are fraudulently recruited through intermediaries and unscrupulous agents. They live in truly inhumane conditions, far from their families for a long time, in constant and dangerous work, with false contracts or as pawns of their employers. There are known cases of great cruelty, which are cause for bitter sadness.

For the Holy See, it is essential that effective measures and relevant initiatives are developed to monitor, identify and save fishermen who are victims of trafficking, and inhuman and degrading treatment. We have heard how international regulations may be developed in this sense, so that decent opportunities are offered to people. We must do this by encouraging measures and provisions that protect exploited, deceived and mistreated fishermen, measure that respect international treaties on fisheries and, particularly, in the labour sector, and that continue to fight against the atrocious scourge of trafficking of human beings.

The world in which we live, despite the daily fluctuations of demands, activities and criteria, continues to need

values such as justice, solidarity, promotion and respect for the fundamental rights of human beings, especially those who are poor, disadvantaged or in vulnerable situations. They expect from us a welcoming hand and pray that we do not leave them forgotten or neglected. They wait for the assistance that will help take them out of their difficult position.

Only if we collaborate together, joining efforts, we will be able to protect those who live in unfair situations in the fishing sector, safeguarding the marine environment and the different fish species and ending, once and for all, the ruthless human exploitation that negatively influences the fishing activity in many countries.

We have to insert the hope that is needed and that is a source of confidence for the future of many of our peers. If we convince ourselves that the fishing sector supplies not only material resources, but also spiritual values, that inner wealth that is so lacking in our day and that is the fruit of solidarity, sharing and fraternity, then we can really do good. In this way, the work of all those who make up the fishing sector will be able to improve and ours will become an effective service for every person and will contribute to the promotion of human dignity and the greatness of the peoples.

The Holy See is close to international organizations such as the FAO, the ILO and the IMO, which promote the aforementioned objectives, which are also of particular concern to the Catholic Church as witnessed through its efforts and initiatives in various countries of the world. I thank you kindly for the opportunity that has been given to me today and I thank you for your attention.
