

Intervention of the Holy See
Third session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals

**“Food security and nutrition, sustainable agriculture,
desertification, land degradation and drought”**

New York, 22-24 May 2013

Mr. Co-Chair,

With close to a billion of our fellow human beings going to bed hungry each day, the urgency for moving the world towards sustainable models of food security and nutrition must be regarded as one of the driving forces of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The ongoing scandal in our times of such wide-spread hunger and malnutrition that persists in a large number of developing countries is all the more egregious when we grasp the reality that malnutrition remains the world's biggest health risk - claiming more victims each year than AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis combined. Despite the capacity of the international community to produce sufficient food for every human being and in spite of international commitments to food security, it is a shame that so many of the poor people in the world continue to find themselves helpless victims of chronic hunger.

Lack of access to adequate food and nutrition is a moral and humanitarian crisis exacerbated by man-made policies and practices such as market distortions through excessive financial speculation on food commodities, armed conflict, diverting food resources from consumption to energy production, waste of food resources and failure to provide access to markets for producers in developing countries.

In face of the world's hungry, the grotesque spectacle of foodstuffs being forcibly destroyed in order to preserve higher market prices for producers, primarily in developed countries, constitutes a reprehensible practice which prioritizes economic profit over the needs of those starving. It is not by destroying the very sustenance needed for the survival of the poor that we could possibly imagine to be building a more prosperous or affluent world.

Like the very air we breathe, food and nutrition are absolutely vital for human life and hence constitute a fundamental right of all human beings. In consequence, food should never be treated like any other commodity. Ending the scourge of hunger is unlike other social goals like healthcare, which are looking towards technologies or cures yet to come or not currently available. Instead, the eradication of hunger is a question we can address today if we have a unified commitment to making the changes necessary so that all people, including the poor, can fully participate in food production and consumption.

The call to action here is all the more urgent when we acknowledge that hunger is one of the world's most solvable problems. When hunger is treated as merely a technical or environmental concern, it reduces human need to a mathematical equation to be solved through ever-increased food production or draconian population control programs. Such so-called solutions ignore the fact that hunger is also a moral and human problem, with the guiding imperative of respect for human dignity tantamount in all aspects of food production and consumption.

For the past four decades per capita food production has steadily risen and total world food production now exceeds what is needed to give every person sufficient food and nutrition. Therefore, if hunger were merely a technical problem it would have been solved long ago. Hunger persists, rather, because of the persistence of “structures of famine”¹ and the “shortage of social resources”² - not

¹ Address of Pope John Paul II to the XXVIII Session of the Conference of FAO, 25 October 1995.

because of any lack of food production. What is evidently needed from civil and political leaders is that they work together to achieve freedom from hunger, and the recognition that addressing the technical and structural causes of hunger and malnutrition requires not solely desire of mind but also responsible determination of heart in a commitment of real solidarity, which propagates a culture of sharing towards those who lack adequate food and nutrition.

Defeating hunger in our lifetime is a goal that thus requires initiatives and structures inspired by fraternal solicitude and care for those in need so as to provide greater collaborative participation in food production and universal access to sufficient quantities of food and nutrition. To this end, adequate funding and technological resources to farmers and developing countries is necessary in order to help them address the environmental and man-made challenges to food production, transit and distribution.

Mr. Co-Chair,

The Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 framework must be rooted in the primary right of every person to be free of hunger. This approach allows discussions on global food management, sustainable production and equitable consumption to move beyond discussions of pure economic profitability and seek to promote the integral human development of all people. Such a rights-based approach recognizes that access to food and nutrition is intrinsically and unbreakably linked to the protection and promotion of the fundamental right to life at every stage and every age.

Progress on food security behooves our role as stewards of creation through the promotion of sustainable and responsible agricultural programs. Accordingly, the development of agriculture as a fundamental element of food security must remain among the key priorities of national and international political action. Increasing concentration in the hands of a few of land-ownership and the means of agricultural production by the few represents a moral obligation for political and social leaders to engage in the quest for policies more equitable and just for long-term open and inclusive agrarian reform. Such reform requires that our Sustainable Development Goals will incorporate and promote policies that invest in the family and provides “farmers with solid formation, constant updating and technical assistance in their activity, as well as support for initiatives to build associations and cooperatives capable of proposing effective models of production.”³

In our common desire to win the battle against hunger and malnutrition in the world, governments should introduce effective programs and policies that ensure food and nutritional security for their people. Governmental programs and international assistance necessitate assuming the responsibility for providing financial and material assistance to those most in need and most impacted by hunger and malnutrition, such as children, pregnant women, the disabled, the elderly, people affected by natural disasters and to all those who have no daily bread.

Mr. Co-Chair,

A sustainable development goal for the elimination of hunger is not only a clear necessity but it is also a moral imperative if we are to produce meaningful post-2015 development agenda. One of the reasons the United Nations was founded was for the noble goal of creating a “world free of want” and this hoped-for goal, now within reach, will remain forever elusive and imaginary if we acquiesce in the knowledge that a billion of our brothers and sisters will go to bed hungry this very day.

Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair.

² Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, n.27.

³ Message of Pope Benedict XVI to the 36th Session of the Governing Council of the International Fund for Agricultural Development.