



The Holy See

OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 42nd SESSION OF THE
GOVERNING COUNCIL OF THE INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT,
AN AGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN ROME

Thursday, 14 February 2019

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE OPENING CEREMONY**

*Mr. President of IFAD,
Heads of State,
Mr. President of the Council of Ministers of Italy,
Ministers,
Delegates and Permanent Representatives of Member States,
Ladies and gentlemen:*

I have accepted with pleasure the invitation that you addressed to me, Mr President, on behalf of

the *International Fund for Agricultural Development* (ifad), for this opening ceremony of the 42nd session of the Governing Council of this Intergovernmental Organization.

My presence is intended to set before you the desires and needs of the multitude of our brothers and sisters who suffer in the world. I wish we could look them in the face without blushing, because finally their appeal had been heard and their concerns addressed. They live in precarious situations: the air is contaminated, natural resources are depleted, the rivers polluted, the soils acidified; they do not have enough water for themselves or for their crops; their sanitary infrastructures are extremely insufficient; their housing is poor and inadequate.

And these situations continue at a time when, on the other hand, our society has made great advancements in other areas of knowledge. This means we are facing a society that is capable of advancing its good purposes; and the battle against hunger and misery will also be won, if it is tackled seriously. Determination in this battle is paramount, so that we can hear — not like a slogan but as a truth — “Hunger has no present or future. Only a past”. For this, it is necessary to combine the help of the international community, civil society and those who possess resources. Responsibilities cannot be evaded, passed from one to another, but rather are to be assumed so as to offer real, practical solutions. These are the concrete and real solutions that we must pass on from one to the other.

The Holy See has always encouraged the efforts made by international agencies to address poverty. In December 1964, in [Bombay](#), India, Saint [Paul VI](#) requested and subsequently reiterated in other circumstances, the creation of a Global Fund to combat poverty and to give a decisive impetus to the comprehensive development of the most impoverished areas of humanity (cf. [Address to the participants in the World Conference on Food, 9 November 1974](#)). Since then, his Successors have continued to encourage and give impetus to similar initiatives, and one of the most noteworthy examples is ifad.

This 42nd session of the Governing Council of ifad promotes this logic and has before it a gripping and crucial objective: to create unprecedented possibilities, to dispel all hesitation and put all peoples in a condition to deal with their pressing needs. The international community, which drafted the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, needs to take further steps to achieve the 17 objectives that constitute it. In this regard, ifad’s contribution is essential in order to fulfil the first two objectives of the Agenda, those related to the eradication of poverty, the fight against hunger and the promotion of food sovereignty. And none of this will be possible without achieving rural development, a development that has long been talked about but that has not yet come to fruition. And it is paradoxical that a large part of the more than 820 million people suffering from hunger and malnutrition in the world live in rural areas, and — this is paradoxical — are engaged in food production and farming. In addition, the exodus from the countryside to the city is a global trend that we cannot ignore in our considerations.

Local development, therefore, has value in itself and not in terms of other objectives. It is a matter of ensuring that each person and each community may fully realize their own capacities, thus living a human life worthy of that name. It is necessary to help realize all this, not from the top down, but for them and with them — “*pour et avec*”, as the President said.

I urge those who have responsibility in the nations and intergovernmental organizations, as well as those who can contribute from the public and private sectors, to develop the necessary channels so that the appropriate measures can be implemented in the rural regions of the earth, enabling them to be responsible architects of their production and progress.

The problems that negatively affect the future of many of our brothers at the present time cannot be solved in an isolated, occasional or ephemeral way. Today more than ever we have to join forces, achieve consensus, strengthen ties. The current challenges are so intricate and complex that we cannot continue to confront them occasionally, with emergency measures. It is necessary to directly empower the people affected by poverty, without considering them as mere recipients of aid that could end up creating dependency. Once a people grows accustomed to dependency, it does not develop. The aim is always to affirm the centrality of the human person, remembering that “new processes taking shape cannot always fit into frameworks imported from outside; they need to be based in the local culture itself” (Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, n. 44), which is always original. And in this sense, and as has been the case in recent years, ifad has achieved better results through greater decentralization, promoting south-south cooperation, diversifying funding sources and modes of action, and promoting action based on evidence and which, at the same time, generates knowledge. I fraternally encourage you to continue on this path, which is humble, but is the right one. A path that should always result in improved living conditions of the most needy people.

Lastly, I share with you some more specific reflections regarding the theme “Rural innovation and entrepreneurship”, which guides this session of the Governing Council of ifad. It is essential to promote innovation, entrepreneurial capacity, the commitment of local actors and the efficiency of productive processes to achieve rural transformation, in order to eradicate malnutrition and to develop the rural environment in a sustainable way. And in that context, it is necessary to promote a “conscientious science” and place technology truly at the service of the poor. On the other hand, new technologies should not be contrasted with local cultures and traditional knowledge, but rather should complement and act in synergy with them.

I encourage all of you present here, and those who regularly work at the International Fund for Agricultural Development, so that your work, efforts and deliberations may be for the benefit of the marginalized — in this throwaway culture — and for the benefit of the victims of indifference and selfishness; and that in this way we can totally defeat hunger and achieve a copious harvest of justice and prosperity. Thank you.

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS AT THE IV MEETING OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' FORUM

Distinguished Friends,

I thank Ms Myrna Cunningham for her kind words, and I am happy to greet those who, coinciding with the sessions of the Governing Council, have held the Fourth Global Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum, convened by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (ifad). The theme of its work was "Promoting indigenous peoples' knowledge and innovations for climate resilience and sustainable development".

Your presence here shows that environmental issues are extremely important, and invites us once again to look at our planet, harmed in many regions by human greed, by armed conflicts that engender a range of evils and misfortunes, as well as natural catastrophes that leave poverty and devastation in their wake. We cannot continue to ignore these scourges, responding to them with indifference or a lack of solidarity, or postponing the measures that are required to confront them effectively. On the contrary, only a vigorous sense of brotherhood will strengthen our hand today in bringing help to those who need it, and opening the door to tomorrow for the generations that will come after us.

God created the earth for the benefit of all, so that it would be a welcoming place where no one would feel excluded and where everyone could find a home. Our planet is rich in natural resources. And indigenous peoples, with their abundant variety of languages, cultures, traditions, knowledge and ancestral methods, become for all of us a wake-up call that emphasizes that man is not the owner of nature, but only its steward, the one who has the vocation to watch over it with care, so that its biodiversity is not lost and water can remain pure and crystal clear, the air clean, forests leafy and the soil fertile.

Indigenous peoples are a living appeal for hope. They remind us that human beings have a shared responsibility in the care of the "common home". And if certain decisions taken thus far have ruined it, it is never too late to learn the lesson and adopt a new lifestyle. It is about adopting a way to move forward which, leaving behind superficial approaches and harmful or exploitative habits, overcomes atrocious individualism, convulsive consumerism and cold selfishness. The earth suffers and the native peoples are familiar with the dialogue with the earth; they know what it means to listen to the earth, to see the earth, to touch the earth. They know the art of living well, in harmony with the earth. And we must learn this; perhaps we are tempted by a kind of progressivistic illusion at the earth's expense. Let us never forget our grandparents' expression: "God always forgives, men sometimes forgive, nature never forgives". And we are seeing this, due

to mistreatment and exploitation. You, who know how to dialogue with the earth, are entrusted with passing on this ancestral wisdom.

If we join forces and, in a constructive spirit, engage in patient and generous dialogue, we will end up becoming more aware that we need each other; that conduct harmful to our surrounding environment also negatively affects the serenity and fluidity of coexistence which, at times, has not been coexistence but rather, destruction; that the poor cannot continue to suffer injustices, and young people have a right to a better world than ours and await convincing responses from us.

Thank you all for the tenacity with which you affirm that the earth does not exist simply to be exploited without consideration, but also to be extolled, cared for, embraced. Thank you for raising your voice to assert that respect for the environment must always be safeguarded over and above exclusively economic and financial interests. ifad's experience, its technical competence, as well as the means at its disposal, provide a valuable service in carving out roads that recognize that "a technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress" (Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 194).

And, in our collective imagination, there is also a danger: that we so-called civilized peoples are "first class" and the so-called native or indigenous peoples are "second class". No. This is the great error of an uprooted progress, detached from the earth. It is necessary for both peoples to dialogue. Today urgently calls for "cultural mingling", in which the wisdom of the indigenous peoples can dialogue at the same level with the wisdom of the most developed peoples, without the one canceling out the other. "Cultural mingling" would be the goal towards which we must strive with equal dignity.

As I encourage you to move forward, I implore God to continue to accompany with his blessings your communities, and those in ifad who work to protect those who live in the rural and poorest areas of the world, but who are richer in the wisdom of coexistence with nature.

Thank you.

HOLY FATHER'S GREETING
TO THE STAFF OF THE INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Ladies and gentlemen,

I could speak in Spanish, which is one of the official languages, but I prefer to speak Italian, as I am sure it is better for all of you.

I thank the President of ifad for his attention, for his courtesy, and I am happy to be able to meet you, who work every day for this important United Nations institution. You are at the service of the world's poorest: people who, for the most part, live in rural areas, in regions far removed from big cities, often in difficult and burdensome conditions. To all of you present here, as well as to your colleagues who could not be with us — there are many of you working here! — I address a warm greeting.

Thinking of you, two simple terms come to mind. The first, which springs from the heart, is '*thank you*'. I thank God for your work at the service of a cause as noble as the battle against hunger and poverty in the world. Thank you for going against the current: today's tendency is toward slowing down the pace of reducing extreme poverty and increasing the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. There are a few who have too much, and too many who have little. There are a few who have too much, and too many who have little, that is the logic of today. Many do not have food to eat and live adrift while a few drown in excess. This perverse current of inequality is disastrous for humanity's future. So, thank you because you think and act against the current. And thank you also for your silent, often hidden work — I would also say at times boring — hidden like the roots of a tree, that cannot be seen, but from which comes the sap that nourishes the whole plant. Perhaps you do not receive many awards or honours, but God sees all, and knows your self-denial and professionalism — I emphasize the word professionalism —, he appreciates the hours you spend diligently in the office and the sacrifices involved. God never forgets good and knows how to reward those who are good and generous.

Your work brings benefits to many needy and disadvantaged people, who survive with much suffering in the world's peripheries. To perform this type of service well, it is necessary to join skill with a particular human sensitivity. Therefore, I would like to advise you always to cultivate your inner life and the sentiments that expand the heart and ennoble individuals and peoples. They are treasures that are worth more than any material good. Expanding the heart. Also thanks to your contribution, it is possible to develop projects that help children in need — there are many in the world — so many! — women, and entire families. Many good initiatives are carried out with your support. Therefore, I thank you for this work, and I do so also on behalf of the many poor people you serve.

The second term I would like to say to you, after '*thank you*', is '*forward!*'. It means continuing your work with renewed commitment, without tiring, without losing hope, without giving in to resignation, thinking that it is only a drop in the ocean. Mother Teresa said: "Yes, it is a drop in the ocean, but with that drop, the ocean is different". The secret lies in keeping and nurturing lofty motivations. In this way, the dangers of pessimism, mediocrity and the tendency of habit are overcome, and you can put enthusiasm into what is done day by day, even into small things, the things whose outcome we do not see. The word '*enthusiasm*' is really beautiful: we can also understand it as 'putting God into what you do'. It originates there: *en-theos*, enthusiasm, putting God into what you do. Because God never tires of doing good; he never tires of starting over. Each of us has

experienced this: how many times have we started over in our life! And this is beautiful. He never tires of giving hope. He is the key to not getting tired. And praying — for those who can pray — helps to recharge the batteries with clean energy. It is good for us to ask the Lord to work by our side. And the person who cannot pray because he is not a believer must expand his heart and desire good. As teenagers say: “send good vibes”, desire the good of others. It is a way of praying for those who do not have faith and are not believers but they are able to do this.

Furthermore, in every document you deal with, I advise you to *seek a face*. This is important: behind every one of the papers there is a face, ten faces, many faces.... Look for a face: the faces of the people who are behind those papers. Placing yourself in their shoes to better understand their situation.... It is important not to remain on the surface, but to try to enter the real life situations in order to perceive the faces and to reach peoples' hearts. They are very far away, but they are 'transcribed' here. Thus, work becomes a matter of taking others to heart, the events and histories of all.

And a final matter: let us remember what Saint John of the Cross said: “The soul that walks in love neither tires others nor grows tired” (*Sayings of Light and Love*, 97). To go forward it is necessary to *love*. The question to ask is not “how much do these things I must do burden me?”, but rather, “how much love do I put into these things that I am doing now?”. One who loves has the imagination to discover solutions where others see only problems. One who loves helps others according to their needs and with creativity, not according to pre-established or commonplace ideas. He is a creator: love leads you to create, it is always in the lead.

Enthusiasm, seeking faces, loving: in this way one can go forward, and in this way I encourage you, too, to go ahead, day by day.

God bless you, your loved ones and the work you do at ifad for the benefit of many, to defeat the very grave scourge which is world hunger. And I too ask something: I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me, or at least to send good thoughts my way. Thank you!