



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO JACQUES DIOUF ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD FOOD DAY*

To Mr Jacques Diouf

*Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*As World Food Day approaches, my thoughts turn to you, Mr Director-General, and to those who work with you, to express my appreciation of all that has been done in the past and my heartfelt encouragement to continue your generous work for our brothers and sisters who are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. The theme proposed this year, "*A millennium free from hunger*", is particularly inspiring, both for the perspective it opens on the new millennium and for the glimpse it gives of the relationship between freedom and the satisfaction of basic human needs. This holds special significance for Christians, who see the Jubilee of the Year 2000 as the "year of grace" in which once again the incarnate Word of God "proclaims release to captives" (cf. *Lk 4: 18-19*). To free hundreds of millions of human beings who are currently victims of this scourge is not an easy task. First of all, it presupposes the commitment to uproot the causes of hunger and malnutrition. In this regard, it should be remembered, as we learn precisely in the FAO's latest annual report, that wars and internal conflicts are the primary cause of food shortages. It is painful to note that precisely "for the rural population, internal conflicts are more devastating than international wars". Here too the question of freedom and responsibility arises. In fact, "if, for example, man was responsible for 10% of the food crises in 1984, he was responsible for 50% in 1999". Freedom from hunger also means freedom from war. It is not by chance that, when praying in the Litany of the Saints for deliverance, the Catholic Church associates illness and hunger with war: "*a peste, fame et bello libera nos, Domine*". We must also recognize that overcoming the problem of hunger and food insecurity does not depend simply on greater food production. There would be enough food for everyone in the world if it were adequately distributed. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The problem is an ancient one: it was already noted by St Augustine when he invited wealthy Christians to share some of their goods with those who had none. He eloquently remarked: "He who has no need of food wants to be fed in the poor", "*In paupere se pasci voluit, qui non esurit*" (*Sermon 206, 2*). And he concluded: "Let voluntary mortification sustain those who have nothing", "*Castigatio volentis fiat sustentatio non habentis*" (*Sermon 210, 12*). It would be no small achievement for this World Food Day, if those who have an abundance of material goods were to commit themselves to a reasonably austere lifestyle, so that they can aid those who have nothing to eat. If some would free themselves from excessively extravagant habits, it would bring freedom to others, who could thus escape the devastating scourge of hunger and malnutrition. When the Christian, in fidelity to the Saviour's command, recites each day the prayer he himself taught us, he turns to God the Father and asks, in the plural, for bread: "Give us this day our daily bread". The Christian

knows well that he cannot withdraw into selfish consideration of his own well-being alone. The divine Teacher also taught him to take responsibility for the needs of others. His prayer will therefore be true, if it is expressed in a sincere commitment to concrete solidarity. Upon you, Mr Director-General, upon the representatives of the nations accredited to the FAO, upon those who work in your organization and upon all who are associated with your generous activity, I invoke the abundant blessings of almighty God. *From the Vatican, 4 October*

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