



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL FUND
FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT (IFAD)***

To H.E. Mr Lennart Båge President of IFAD

1. I thank you for your gracious invitation to take part in the solemn ceremony to observe the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

I have asked Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State, to convey to you my appreciation and my word for this major event, which has brought together in Rome representatives of many governments and international organizations.

On this occasion, I especially wish to greet Dr Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, President of the Italian Republic, Mr Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General, and the heads of the other agencies of the "Roman branch" of the United Nations. This distinguished assembly bears witness to a shared commitment to determine the strategies to achieve the goal of freeing humanity from hunger and malnutrition.

In this endeavour, IFAD's contribution is really original due to the statutory criteria that define its structure, guide its action and give it the specific duty of allocating financial resources to the "poorest of the poor", for the agricultural development of countries which suffer from a lack of food (cf. *IFAD Statute*, art. 1). The establishment of IFAD among the agencies of the United Nations, in fact, reminds us that to tackle hunger and malnutrition, effective planning is required to ensure the distribution of agricultural techniques and of the available financial resources.

Certainly, the commitment to solidarity, promoted by IFAD until now, for combating rural poverty has identified a concrete means of guaranteeing food security, detaching it from the sole considerations related to the availability of foodstuffs for consumption, and pressing for the sharing of resources, beginning with rural workers and rural communities. In this view, food security can

constitute the necessary guarantee for the respect of every person's right to be free from hunger.

It means taking a positive approach at a time when serious reason for concern exists in many parts of the world considered to be at risk in terms of levels of nutrition. The contradiction between the possibilities of intervention and the will to work concretely, seriously endangers the survival of millions of people within a worldwide reality that is, on the whole, living an unprecedented development and progress, and is conscious of the availability of resources at a global level.

2. In this observance, together with the applause for the objectives achieved, we must not ignore the motives that in 1974 induced the international community to establish the Fund as a concrete measure "to give to the members of the farming community responsibility in their production and progress" (*ORE*, 21 November 1974, p. 10), to quote the words of my Predecessor Pope Paul VI, who concretely encouraged the establishment of this Organization (*Discourse to the World Food Conference*, 9 November 1974, n. 8).

We think right away of the victims of conflicts and of serious violations of fundamental rights, of the reality of refugees and evacuees, and of those affected by sickness and epidemics. All these situations threaten the orderly coexistence of persons and communities, are a serious risk to human life, and have obvious repercussions on food security and, more generally, on the standard of living in rural areas.

These special situations and circumstances, together with the information submitted to be examined in this meeting, urge us to recognize the centrality of the human person and his basic needs as the foundation on which to build without delay international action.

In fact, if we turn our attention to the phenomena that define the present panorama of international life, in the first place there emerge the conflict of interests and desire to predominate which lead to giving up negotiation and withdrawing into isolation, thus hindering the activity of cooperation to respond effectively to needs. Nor should we forget the unfortunate resignation that seems to have snuffed out the will to live of entire populations, whom hunger and malnutrition have pushed to the margins of the Community of Nations, far from conditions of life that are truly respectful of human dignity.

Although the expectations placed in the action of IFAD focus on the sector of agriculture and food, they belong to a wider strategy in the fight against poverty and are accompanied by the conviction that this objective is a response to the millions of persons who wonder about their own hope for life.

3. Once more, my message wishes to show the attention of the Holy See for multilateral international action, a factor more and more crucial to that peace which is the deepest aspiration of peoples at the present time.

I encourage IFAD, especially, to exert every effort in the fight against poverty and hunger, inviting all to overcome those obstacles that are the fruit of special interests, barriers and every kind of selfish interest.

May the observance of the anniversary of the Fund be the occasion to re-inforce a direct commitment to be translated into concrete action, which may make each person feel responsible not for *something*, but for *someone*, for the human person who asks for his daily bread.

Upon IFAD, on yourselves and on your efforts to serve the cause of the human person, may Almighty God pour out his abundant blessings.

From the Vatican, 19 February 2003.

JOHN PAUL II

* *L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n.13 p.2.