



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE COUNCIL OF
INTERPARLIAMENTARY UNION***

Monday, 30 November 1998

*Mr President of the Council of the Interparliamentary Union,
Gentlemen,*

I welcome you here with joy and gratitude on the occasion of the conference you are holding in Rome, and I appreciate the spirit of your meeting and the information you have given me about your work. On the occasion of the Food Summit for Heads of State and Government organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization in 1996, the members of the Interparliamentary Union solemnly committed themselves to promoting the summit's goals and, in particular, to ensuring that the number of those suffering from malnutrition would be reduced to one half by the year 2015.

They also stressed the need to set up legal frameworks to direct world agricultural development in a way that respects the environment. You have now gathered on the threshold of the third millennium to continue your examination of issues concerning food security and to analyze the obstacles and challenges that present themselves in this area.

Your agenda is divided into three concrete topics which are essential if we really wish to follow through on the commitments of the 1996 Summit: how to attain sustainable levels of food security that can keep pace with the growth in demand, and what to do so that different economic factors, such as production, distribution, international trade, scientific research and financial investments, are organized according to the objective of food security for everyone? How can we maintain an adequate basis of common resources (biodiversity, land, fishing, water, forests), and how can we promote the harmonious development of human, technological and financial capital? What parliamentary actions are needed to solve the immediate problems of food security, as well as the deepest causes of poverty?

This is a realistic programme, since it recognizes the interaction of so many political, social and economic elements in the development and possible solution of the problem of food security; but it is also an ambitious and generous programme,

because it recognizes the human capacity for finding solutions to so many problems and firmly calls for your action and that of your colleagues to achieve these noble aims. I can only rejoice in these initiatives in the firm hope that they will bear abundant fruit in the form of proposals and concrete actions. It is not the role of the Catholic Church's hierarchy to offer specific technical solutions, but its task is continually to support men and women of good will who freely contribute all their human resources to the search for solutions and accept the share of the responsibility that their role in society demands.

The Church also endeavours to inspire dialogue and co-operation so that everyone involved in social life, by mutual encouragement and the calm consideration of their different viewpoints, will find ways that lead to rapid and effective solutions. A proper perception of the international economy must allow the right to nutrition of each and every one of the earth's inhabitants to be satisfied, according to the terms defined by various international instruments. The diverse circumstances connected with natural disasters, international conflicts or civil wars must never be an excuse for disregarding this obligation, which not only binds international organizations and the governments of countries experiencing a food emergency, but also, and most particularly, those States which through God's mercy are custodians of abundant wealth and material means.

Permanent, universal food security depends on a great number of political and economic decisions which most often ignore completely those who are suffering hunger and, instead, are often connected with other political decisions taken in certain States according to considerations of national or regional power. On the contrary, international solidarity, properly understood, must ensure that all national and international decisions can take into account the country's interests and external needs, without becoming an obstacle to the development of others, but while still contributing to world progress, particularly that of the less developed countries.

In this context, how could we not mention the problem of the external debt of the poorest countries and the difficulty many other developing countries have in gaining access to credit under conditions that maintain and encourage balanced human and social development? Your working programme mentions financial issues and the debt problem as conditions of food security. May God enlighten the politicians of the more fortunate countries so that they will find generous ways to take care of the costs of international programmes to reduce this burden or cancel it outright, a burden so heavy that it crushes the neediest peoples in many of the world's regions!

At the time when the Declaration of the 1996 Rome Summit and the Plan of Action accompanying it were published, the international community unanimously made a certain number of commitments in all areas of the national and international economy in order to achieve its objectives. During the two years following the Declaration of the World Food Summit, many other commitments were made and international projects devised to eliminate extreme poverty and to deal adequately with the financial burden of the poorest countries.

It is quite obvious that international policy statements, like multilateral legal instruments, have no effect if they are not backed by effective national legislation and the political will to implement them. This is why your dialogue and your sharing of experiences with legislative representatives of so many of the world's nations and regions are an encouraging sign of hope. Knowledge and understanding of the realities in other countries or regions of the world can only contribute to the globalization of solidarity.

At the same time, with the help of almighty God, your meeting will also be an additional way to encourage a change in the deepest reasons behind political decisions, so that instead of being guided by a hedonistic life-style and by selfish and excessive consumerism the hearts of men and women will always be attuned to a clear perception of their social responsibilities, even towards the poorest of their brothers and sisters who live in the most remote and forgotten regions of the world.

As I ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in the service you are performing for mankind, I cordially grant my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all your loved ones.

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