

Pontiff Calls Hunger Unacceptable

Suggests New Strategies to Food Summit

VATICAN CITY, JUNE 3, 2008 (Zenit.org).- In a world replete with resources, hunger and malnutrition are simply unacceptable, says Benedict XVI.

The Pope said this in a message written to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) summit on food security, which began today.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Pontiff's secretary of state, read the text at the opening session. The conference, which will discuss the challenges of climate change and bioenergy, ends Thursday.

"Hunger and malnutrition are unacceptable in a world which has, in fact, levels of production, resources and knowledge sufficient to put an end to such dramas and their consequences," wrote the Holy Father.

"The great challenge of today," he said, "is to 'globalize,' not just economic and commercial interests, but also the call for solidarity, while respecting and taking advantage of the contribution of all components of society."

After calling on the world leaders present at the meeting "to collaborate in an increasingly transparent way with [...] organizations committed to closing the growing divide between rich and poor," the Pontiff exhorted them "to continue with structural reforms which, at the national level, are indispensable in order to face the problems of underdevelopment, of which hunger and malnutrition are direct consequences."

Right to life

"Poverty and malnutrition are not a simple fatality, provoked by adverse environmental situations or by disastrous natural calamities," wrote Benedict XVI. He added that "purely technical and economic considerations must not prevail over the duties of justice toward people suffering from hunger."

The "primary right to food is intrinsically linked to the safeguarding and defense of human life," the Pope stated. "Each person has the right to life.

"Hence it is necessary to promote the effective implementation of this right, and peoples suffering from lack of food must be helped to become gradually capable of satisfying their own need for healthy and sufficient nourishment. "Referring to the current problem of rising food prices, the Pontiff called for "new strategies to fight against poverty and to promote rural development, [...] through structural reform processes which enable the challenges posed by security and by climate change to be faced."

"The global increase in agricultural production will, nonetheless, be effective only if accompanied by the effective distribution of that

production, and if it is primarily destined to satisfying essential needs," he added.

Action

Benedict XVI said modern technological methods "are not enough to meet shortfalls in food," noting the need for "political action which, inspired by those principles of natural law written in man's heart, protects the dignity of the individual."

"Only by protecting the person," he said, "is it possible to combat the main cause of hunger."

The Pope insisted that if negotiations and decisions were to take respect for human dignity into account, "it would be possible to overcome otherwise insurmountable obstacles, and to eliminate -- or at least diminish -- disinterest toward the good of others."

"The defense of human dignity in international activity, even in emergencies, would also help to limit superfluity, with a view to the needs of others, and to administer the fruits of creation with justice, placing them at the disposal of all generations," said the Holy Father.

"In the light of such principles," the Pontiff added, "it is my hope that the delegations present at this meeting may take on new commitments and set themselves to pursue them with great determination. The Catholic Church, for her part, wishes to unite herself to these efforts."