

Cardinal Tells of Human Impact of Hunger Says the Right to Food Is Inalienable

ROME, NOV. 10, 2006 (Zenit.org).- Hunger is above all a personal problem, and the solution needs to focus on the human factor, Cardinal Renato Martino said to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization.

The president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace said this last Saturday to a meeting of the Rome-based U.N. organization, which discussed the application of the humanitarian right to food.

"Poverty is a multidimensional social phenomenon," the cardinal said, clarifying that "definitions of poverty and its causes vary by gender, age, culture, and other social and economic contexts."

"For example, in both rural and urban areas of the world, men associate poverty with a lack of material assets, whereas for women poverty is defined as food insecurity. Generational differences emerge as well," he said.

Cardinal Martino continued: "While poverty is material in nature, it has psychological effects -- such as distress at being unable to feed one's children, or insecurity from not knowing where the next meal will come from, or shame at having to go without food."

Quoting Benedict XVI's recent message for World Food Day, the cardinal pointed out that "very often, international action to combat hunger ignores the human factor, and priority is given instead to technical and socioeconomic aspects."

He continued: "Local communities need to be involved in choices and decisions concerning land use, since farmland is being diverted increasingly to other purposes, often with damaging effects on the environment and the long-term viability of the land."

"If the human person is treated as the protagonist, it becomes clear that the short-term economic gains must be placed within the context of better long-term planning for food security, with regard to both quantity and quality."

True reform

Cardinal Martino said that "the right to have enough to eat is fundamental and inalienable for every person and for their family."

The Holy See representative emphasized that "concrete efforts must be made to bring about true agrarian reform."

"In some countries, for example, 1% of the population controls 50% of the land. A more equitable distribution of land, with the consequent increase in participation in food production, especially by the poor, is an important component of any such solution," he said.

"In this regard, the right of women to have access to land must also be strongly reaffirmed," the cardinal added.

He continued: "As we consider the conditions for food security and sustainable agriculture as means to ending the scourge of hunger, we must admit that in our day there exists what the late Pope John Paul II once called 'structures of famine,' which can only be overcome with an attitude of solidarity touching on every aspect of development: formation and use of capital, investments, surpluses, and production and distribution systems.

"Each phase has an underlying moral and ethical dimension. Indeed, economic policies themselves cannot be separated from ethical considerations."

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