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Message of the Holy Father on the occasion of the Pre-Summit on the “Food System Summit 2021”

The following is the Message - read by Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, secretary for Relations with States - sent by the Holy Father Francis to His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, secretary general of the United Nations, and to the participants in the Pre-Summit on the Food System Summit 2021 organised by the United Nations in Rome from 26 to 28 July 2021:

Message of the Holy Father

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I warmly greet all those participating in this important meeting, which once again highlights how one of our greatest challenges today is to overcome hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the era of COVID-19.

This pandemic has confronted us with the systemic injustices that undermine our unity as a human family. Our poorest brothers and sisters, and the Earth, our Common Home that “cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her”,^[1] demand radical change.

We develop new technologies with which we are able to increase the planet's capacity to bear fruit, yet we continue to exploit nature to the point of barrenness,^[2] thus expanding not only the deserts of the earth, but also internal spiritual deserts.^[3] We produce enough food for all people, but many go without their daily bread. This “constitutes a genuine scandal”^[4], an offence that violates basic human rights. Therefore, it is everyone's duty to eliminate this injustice^[5] through concrete actions and good practices, and through bold local and international policies.

From this perspective, the careful and correct transformation of food systems plays an important role, which must be geared towards being able to increase resilience, strengthen local economies, improve nutrition, reduce food waste, provide healthy diets accessible to all, and be environmentally sustainable and respectful of local cultures.

If we are to guarantee the fundamental right to an adequate standard of living[6] and meet our commitments to achieve Zero Hunger[7], it is not enough to produce food. We need a new mindset and a new holistic approach[8] and must plan food systems that protect the Earth and keep the dignity of the human person at the centre; that ensure enough food globally and promote decent work locally; and that feed the world today, without compromising the future.

It is essential to restore the centrality of the rural sector, on which the fulfilment of many basic human needs depends, and it is urgent that the agricultural sector regain a priority role in the political and economic decision-making process, aimed at outlining the framework of the post-pandemic “re-start” process that is being constructed. In this process, small farmers and farming families must be considered as key actors. Their traditional knowledge should not be overlooked or ignored, while their direct participation allows them to better understand their priorities and real needs. It is important to facilitate the access of small farmers and family farming to the services necessary for the production, marketing and use of agricultural resources. The family is an essential component of food systems, because it is in the family that “we learn how to enjoy the fruits of the earth without abusing it. We also discover the most effective means for spreading lifestyles respectful of our personal and collective good”. [9] This recognition must be accompanied by policies and initiatives that fully meet the needs of rural women, promote youth employment and improve the work of farmers in the poorest and most remote areas.

We are aware that individual, self-centred and conflicting - but powerful - economic interests [10] prevent us from conceiving of a food system that responds to the values of the Common Good, solidarity and the “culture of encounter”. If we want to maintain a fruitful multilateralism[11] and a food system based on responsibility, justice, peace and unity of the human family is paramount[12].

The crisis we are currently facing is in fact a unique opportunity to engage in authentic, bold and courageous dialogues,[13] addressing the roots of our unjust food system.

Throughout this meeting, we have the responsibility to realise the dream of a world where bread, water, medicine and work flow in abundance and reach those most in need first. The Holy See and the Catholic Church will put themselves at the service of this noble goal, offering their contribution, joining forces and wills, actions and wise decisions.

I pray to God that no one will be left behind, and that the basic needs of every person may be met. May this meeting for the regeneration of food systems set us on the path towards building a peaceful and prosperous society, and sow the seeds of peace that will allow us to walk in true fraternity[14].

Vatican City, 26 July 2021

FRANCIS

[1] Pope Francis, 2015, Encyclical Letter Laudato si' - on care for our common home, 2.

[2] Cf. Paul VI, 1971, Octogesima Adveniens, 21.

[3] Benedict XVI, 2005, [3] Benedict XVI, 2005, Homily for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome, 24 April 2005.

[4] Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti - on fraternity and social friendship, 189.

[5] Cf. Pope Francis, 2017, Message to the Participants in the Fortieth General Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

[6] General Assembly of the United Nations, 1948, Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

[7] General Assembly of the United Nations, 2015, Transforming our world: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

[8] Pope Francis, Message for World Food Day 2019.

[9] Pope Francis, Message for World Food Day 2019.

[10] Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti - on fraternity and social friendship, 12, 16, 29, 45, 52.

[11] Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti - on fraternity and social friendship, 174.

[12] Pope Francis, 2015, Video Message to the Seventy-fifth Meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

[13] Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti - on fraternity and social friendship, 201-203.

[14] Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti - on fraternity and social friendship, 2.
