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Message of the Holy Father Francis to the Director General of the FAO for the International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste 2023

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the Director General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Mr. Qu Dongyu, on the occasion of International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste, held today:

Message of the Holy Father

*His Excellency
Mr. Qu Dongyu
Director General of the FAO*

Your Excellency,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address and cordially greet all those who are participating in this meeting on the occasion of the celebration of this International Day.

It is the poor and needy of this world, who collect from the trash the food that others haughtily squander and for which they yearn, who are attentively watching this assembly today. It is young people who are openly calling on us to eradicate once and for all the pernicious effects that food loss and waste have on people and the planet, while at the same time asking us to raise awareness so that such harmful and damaging practices are not repeated.

Unfortunately, however, the scourge of food loss and waste is as alarming and disastrous as the tragedy of hunger that so cruelly afflicts humanity. I mention these two tragedies together because I consider them to be linked by a single root cause: the prevailing culture which has led to the denaturalisation of the value of food, reducing it to a mere commodity to be exchanged. Added to this is the general indifference towards the indigent, so palpable in the current situation, as well as the scant care given to creation, with the harmful consequences

that this has everywhere. All these attitudes, which can be considered to be rooted in human selfishness, lead many people, on the one hand, to irresponsibly and immoderately part with basic goods and, on the other, not to be indignant when they see that there are still many people who do not have what they need to live. This selfishness is also reflected in the current logic of profit that regulates social relations and in the irrational and voracious exploitation of natural resources.

We must all be clear about the urgency of a radical paradigm shift, because we can no longer limit ourselves to interpreting reality in terms of economics or insatiable profit. Food has a spiritual basis and its proper management implies the need to adopt ethical behaviour. When we talk about food, we must consider the good that more than any other ensures the satisfaction of the fundamental right to life and the basis of the dignified sustenance of each person. Therefore, it must be treated with respect for the sacredness that is proper to it, derived from the primary sacredness of each person, and which is recognized by many traditions, cultures and religions.

Let us always remember: food ensures life and can never be considered a problem. In fact, it is the existence of each person that serves as a purpose and stimulus to improve our daily work. Therefore, we cannot continue to cite world population growth as the cause of the earth's inability to feed everyone sufficiently, because in reality the real reason behind the proliferation of world hunger lies in the lack of concrete political will to redistribute the earth's goods, so that everyone can enjoy what nature gives us, and in the deplorable destruction of food for economic gain.

Food waste, one of the most serious forms of waste generation, also shows an arrogant disregard for everything that, in social and human terms, lies behind food production. Throwing food away means failing to value the sacrifice, labour, transport and energy costs involved in bringing quality food to the table. It means disregarding all those who work hard every day in the agricultural, industrial and service sectors to provide food that was lost or wasted and did not achieve its laudable purpose.

How can food loss and waste be stopped? To achieve this noble goal, it is necessary to invest financial resources, to unite wills, to move from mere declarations to far-sighted and incisive decision-making. Above all, however, it is essential to strengthen our conviction that wasted food is an affront to the poor. It is the sense of justice towards the needy that must impel each and every one of us to a categorical change of mentality and behaviour. This is becoming ever more pressing, for it must be recognized, and I would like to stress this, that the food we throw away is unjustly taken from the hands of those who lack it. From those who have a right to daily bread because of their inviolable human dignity. Saint Paul was clear when he said that it is not a matter of relieving others of hardship; it is a matter of equalizing. The abundance of some must compensate for the lack of others (cf. *2 Cor 8:13-15*). Development, therefore, must be closely related to sobriety of life. They form an inseparable pairing.

It is also necessary to rekindle in ourselves the awareness of our common belonging to the one universal human family. The person who goes to bed with an empty stomach is our brother. To share with him what we have is an imperative both of justice and of that fraternal solidarity which springs from family relationships.

As I pray to God that the family of Nations may once again become genuine, that it may once again be a place where concord, generosity and loving mutual aid among brothers and sisters prevail, I am deeply grateful to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for all the initiatives and programmes it is carrying out to put an end to food loss and waste. May Almighty God fill its work with abundant heavenly gifts for the benefit of all mankind.

Vatican City, 29 September 2023

Francis

