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SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

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Venerdì 20.02.2009

UDIENZA AI PARTECIPANTI ALLA SESSIONE DEL CONSIGLIO DEI GOVERNATORI DEL FONDO INTERNAZIONALE PER LO SVILUPPO AGRICOLO (IFAD)

Alle ore 11.45 di questa mattina, nella Sala Clementina, il Santo Padre riceve in Udienza i partecipanti alla Sessione del Consiglio dei Governatori del Fondo Internazionale per lo Sviluppo Agricolo (IFAD), in occasione del trentesimo anniversario di istituzione del Fondo.

Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso che il Papa rivolge ai presenti:

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Mr President of the Governing Council,

Governors, Permanent Representatives of the Member States,

Officials of the IFAD,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to have this opportunity to meet all of you at the conclusion of the celebrations marking the Thirtieth Anniversary of the establishment of the International Fund for Agricultural Development. I thank the outgoing President, Mr Lennart Båge, for his kind words and I offer congratulations and good wishes to Mr Kanayo Nwanze on his election to this high office. I thank all of you for coming here today and I assure you of my prayers for the important work that you do to promote rural development. Your work is particularly crucial at the present time in view of the damaging effect on food security of the current instability in the prices of agricultural products. This requires new and far-sighted strategies for the fight against rural poverty and the promotion of rural development. As you know, the Holy See fully shares your commitment to overcome poverty and hunger, and to come to the aid of the world's poorest peoples. I pray that IFAD's anniversary celebration will provide you with an incentive to pursue these worthy goals with renewed energy and determination in the years ahead.

Since its earliest days, the International Fund has achieved an exemplary form of cooperation and

coresponsibility between nations at different stages of development. When wealthy countries and developing nations come together to make joint decisions and to determine specific criteria for each country's budgetary contribution to the Fund, it can truly be said that the various Member States come together as equals, expressing their solidarity with one another and their shared commitment to eradicate poverty and hunger. In an increasingly interdependent world, joint decision-making processes of this kind are essential if international affairs are to be conducted with equity and foresight.

Equally commendable is the emphasis placed by IFAD on promoting employment opportunities within rural communities, with a view to enabling them, in the long term, to become independent of outside aid. Assistance given to local producers serves to build up the economy and contributes to the overall development of the nation concerned. In this sense the "rural credit" projects, designed to assist smallholder farmers and agricultural workers with no land of their own, can boost the wider economy and provide greater food security for all. These projects also help indigenous communities to flourish on their own soil, and to live in harmony with their traditional culture, instead of being forced to uproot themselves in order to seek employment in overcrowded cities, teeming with social problems, where they often have to endure squalid living conditions.

This approach has the particular merit of restoring the agricultural sector to its rightful place within the economy and the social fabric of developing nations. Here a valuable contribution can be made by Non-Governmental Organizations, some of which have close links with the Catholic Church and are committed to the application of her social teaching. The principle of subsidiarity requires that each group within society be free to make its proper contribution to the good of the whole. All too often, agricultural workers in developing nations are denied that opportunity, when their labour is greedily exploited, and their produce is diverted to distant markets, with little or no resulting benefit for the local community itself.

Almost fifty years ago, my predecessor Blessed Pope John XXIII had this to say about the task of tilling the soil: "Those who live on the land can hardly fail to appreciate the nobility of the work they are called upon to do. They are living in close harmony with Nature – the majestic temple of Creation ... Theirs is a work which carries with it a dignity all its own" (*Mater et Magistra*, 130-131). All human labour is a participation in the creative providence of Almighty God, but agricultural labour is so in a pre-eminent way. A truly humane society will always know how to appreciate and reward appropriately the contribution made by the agricultural sector. If properly supported and equipped, it has the potential to lift a nation out of poverty and to lay the foundations for increasing prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as we give thanks for the achievements of the past thirty years, there is a need for renewed determination to act in harmony and solidarity with all the different elements of the human family in order to ensure equitable access to the earth's resources now and in the future. The motivation to do this comes from love: love for the poor, love that cannot tolerate injustice or deprivation, love that refuses to rest until poverty and hunger are banished from our midst. The goals of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, as well as promoting food security and rural development, far from being over-ambitious or unrealistic, become, in this context, imperatives binding upon the whole international community. It is my fervent prayer that the activities of such organizations as yours will continue to make a significant contribution to the attainment of these goals. In thanking you and encouraging you to persevere in the good work that you do, I commend you to the constant care of our loving Father, the Creator of Heaven and Earth and all that is therein. May God bless all of you!

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