

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
FOR WORLD FOOD DAY 2023**

*To His Excellency
Qu Dongyu Director-
General of FAO*

Your Excellency:

We are celebrating *World Food Day* at a time when misery and despair continue to afflict many of our brothers and sisters. The cry of anguish and desperation from the poor should awaken us from the lethargy that binds us and prick our consciences. The hunger and malnutrition that grievously affect so many human beings result from an appalling accumulation of injustices and inequalities that leaves many abandoned and neglected while a few revel in wealth and opulence. This injustice extends not only to food but also to all staple resources, whose inaccessibility to many is an affront to their intrinsic, God-given dignity. This outrage should shame the whole of humanity and mobilize the international community.

The central theme of this year's Forum: "*Water is life, water is food. Leave no one behind*", calls on us to focus on the irreplaceable value of this resource for all living beings on our planet. It is therefore imperative to plan and implement water management wisely, carefully and sustainably. We must ensure that everyone can access water to meet their essential needs, and to support and promote proper human development, leaving no one behind.

Water is life because it ensures survival; yet, at present, this resource is threatened by serious quantitative and qualitative challenges. In many parts of the world, our brothers and sisters catch diseases or die due to the absence or scarcity of clean drinking water. Droughts caused by climate change are rendering vast swathes of land barren and wreaking havoc on ecosystems and peoples. The arbitrary management of water resources, their misuse and pollution cause the greatest harm to the destitute and are a shameful wrong to which we cannot remain indifferent. On the contrary, we must urgently recognize that "access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other

human rights” (Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, No. 30). It is therefore essential to invest more in infrastructure, sewage networks, sanitation and wastewater treatment, especially in remote and deprived rural areas. We must also develop educational and cultural models that raise society's awareness of the need to respect and preserve this primary asset. Water must never be seen as a mere commodity, a product to be traded or something to be speculated on.

Water is food because it is essential to achieving food security, being a means of production and an indispensable component of agriculture. For our crops, we need to promote effective programmes to prevent losses in agricultural irrigation pipes, use organic and inorganic pesticides and fertilizers that do not pollute water, and also encourage measures to safeguard the availability of water resources to prevent acute shortages from becoming a cause of conflict between communities, peoples and nations. Science, along with technological and digital innovation, must also be used to achieve a sustainable balance between consumption and available resources, avoiding negative impacts on ecosystems and irreversible damage to the environment. This is why international organizations, governments, civil society, business, academic and research institutions, as well as other entities, must join forces and pool their ideas to make water a common heritage, distribute it more equitably and manage it in a wise and sustainable way.

Lastly, our celebration of *World Food Day* should also remind us of the need to stand up against the culture of waste through actions based on responsible and sincere cooperation. Our world is too interdependent and cannot afford to be divided into blocs of countries that pursue their interests in a self-serving and biased manner. We are called upon instead to think and act in terms of community, of solidarity, prioritizing the lives of all over the appropriation of assets by a few.

Director-General, unfortunately, today we are witnessing a deplorable polarization of international relations due to the ongoing crises and conflicts. Huge financial resources and innovative technologies that could be used to make water a source of life and progress for all are diverted into weapon manufacture and trade. Never before has it been more urgent to advocate for dialogue and peace. The Church tirelessly disseminates values designed to build a civilisation that uses love, mutual respect and reciprocal help as a compass to guide its steps, focusing on those brothers and sisters whose suffering is greatest, such as the hungry and the thirsty.

With these wishes, I would like to thank the *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations* for all it does to promote agricultural development, healthy and sufficient nutrition for everyone and sustainable water use, and I pray for an abundance of heavenly blessings to be bestowed on all those who strive for a better and more fraternal world.

Vatican City, 16 October 2023
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