**Transcript: Cardinal Turkson Intervention**

**FOOD FOR *LIFE*, FOOD *JUSTICE,* FOOD FOR *ALL***

**FOOD FOR ALL: Food Conflicts and the Future of Food Systems**

**31 May 2021**

**14.00-16.00 hrs**

*H.Em. Card. Peter K.A.Turkson (10’)*

Your Excellences,

Distinguished Panelists,

and all of you Speakers,

It is certainly a great pleasure and a great honor for me to join this afternoon’s event on “*Food Conflicts and the Future of Food Systems*”, to mark the close of the *Food for Life, Food Justice, Food for All* series of discussions. On behalf of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, I would like to thank the Secretariat of State of the Holy See, the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to FAO, to IFAD and to the World Food Program, the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences, an all the partner organisations for helping to host this event. This indeed is a propitious occasion for the Holy See not only to help widen the scope of reference of the conversation about food security and food justice; it is also an occasion to invite the Holy See to bring its moral authority to bear on the conversation for the question of hunger and access to food. It’s a truly moral issue as the past three Popes have all seriously observed.

Hunger is not really new in the world. We either experience it or we know about it. We do not lack information and reminders about millions of impoverished human beings who lack nourishment for body, for mind and spirit. In fact, we are inundated by information about malnutrition, hunger and starvation, true reports, figures and statistics by UN agencies, like here in Rome, the World Food and Agricultural Organization, FAO, IFAD and so on, as well as NGOs, academic and research units, and by the media images of hungry men, women and children around the world.

In two webinars on women and food, and on jobs, technology, and food justice, we the Dicastery prepared, with the permanent Mission of the Holy See to the FAO, IFAD, and the World Food Program. We had the privilege of listening to experts in the two areas from around the world, representing different organizations, traditional wisdom, and faiths. They represented graphically, with figures and images, the scary and disconcerting state of our global food system and showed how local Caritas groups and humanitarian organizations helped to show us the deficiencies and disparities in access to food through their food production and distribution network. They illustrated the observation of the wealth of the Food and Agriculture Organization experts that global hunger has been on the rise for several years already, but in 2019 the number of malnourished people in the world had increased by 60 million in relation to 2014, and this in spite of the increase in food production. They feared that even discounting the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, this trend will result in 840 million hungry people in the world by 2030 – far from the “*Zero Hunger*” objective contained in the [Sustainable Development Goal #2](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/). And the pandemic very much worsens the situation for us all.

So dear friends, just as three T’s: Tierra, Trabajo and Techo express the need to drive us in the movement organized by the Vatican, so there are 3 C’s: Conflict, Covid-19 and Climate Change, which captured the key drivers of the food scarcity and hunger in the world today. Their combined devastating effects on all stages of food production and its supply chain are alarming. It is estimated that the pandemic alone will plunge 132 million people into undernourishment.[[1]](#footnote-0) And here, there is the possibility of bringing in up-to-date evidence from South Africa, where a letter calls for help from the Holy See, otherwise a lot of families won’t be able to go through the summer. So the threat of malnourishment and food scarcity is real: not to be reduced to number and statistical figures. Indeed, behind every one of these numbers are people going to bed hungry; families who cannot bring food to the table; and children whose growth and development is stunted.

As Pope Francis observed on the occasion of the World Food Day in Oct, 2020, *“For humanity, hunger is not only a tragedy but it is also shameful”.* In fact, as he wrote in *Fratelli Tutti,* his encyclical letter of late *(189), “hunger is criminal”, since “food is an inalienable right”.* Pope Benedict XVI illustrated the point about the right to food in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (n. 27), saying that: "*the right to food, like the right to water, has an important place within the pursuit of other rights, beginning with the fundamental right to life. It is therefore necessary to cultivate a public conscience that considers food and access to water as universal rights of all human beings, without distinction or discrimination*".

So, food insecurity, however, is not simply a lack of food; a series of interconnected factors which affect food production and distribution in all its stages, underlie the crisis of food insecurity. They are economic, ecological, political, social and cultural- by culture we mean religions and traditional values. Therefore, food insecurity is a complex and a multifaceted issue whose challenges may be framed as follows. How can hunger be overcome? How can safe, affordable nutrition and sustainable food be ensured? How can farm workers and small farmers around the world live and work with dignity? How can rural communities, especially women, survive and thrive? How can land, water, and other elements of God’s creation be preserved, protected and used well in the service of the common good? And, how do we respond to climate change in this regard? Accordingly, dear friends, the solution must recognize this complexity and seek to address it in all its dimensions, and therefore food system in a post-COVID-19 world must be more robust and sustainable. And reimagining and regenerating such robust food systems in a post-Covid-19 world require a holistic approach, in the sense in which integral ecology is presented in the encyclical letter *Laudato Si’* (137ss). Every factor which has contributed to the crisis of food insecurity must be reckoned with and not left to chance or considered as an independent variable. Everything is interconnected and interdependent: ecological, economic, political, cultural, and so on. Therefore, if as Pope Francis observes, “The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air, and in all forms of life,” and if, as Pope Benedict XVI also says, “The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself,” and so on, so the contemporary society needs to review its lifestyle, then the crisis of food insecurity is as much an anthropological issue as it is ecological, economic, political, and so on. Indeed, the peace of the world depends on how we deal with hunger in the world. As Pope Benedict again had the chance to note, “It has also in the global era become a requirement for safeguarding the peace and the stability of this planet.”

And so, just as the Holy Father began this with a video taken from the World Expo in Milan in 2015, I’d like to add that when, in 2015, Italy hosted the Food Expo in Milan, it mounted a campaign that called for a change in lifestyle through the collective forces of our moral and spiritual energies to overcome hunger. The Expo encouraged support for local initiatives, which included: cutting waste, maximizing land use for food production, help for women farmers, application of the fruits of scientific research in famine and food production, and making peace the really indispensable piece of food production. But the greatest contribution to the Expo in 2015 to overcoming hunger lay in the theme of the Expo itself which Pope Francis began his video clip with. The Expo had the theme: One Human Family, Food for All, and this was an appealing title. But, simply converting the first part of this phrase into a precondition, a prior step, lets the title point prophetically towards the global goal of the Expo. And so, as the Vatican delegation has a way of doing this, it reread the title “One Human Family, Food for All,” and so read that when we live as one family, there will be food for all. So we turned that title of the Expo into a longer sentence, indicating that when we live as one human family, there will indeed be food for all. In so doing, the Vatican delegation anticipated the creation of this encyclical of *Fratelli Tutti*, drawing attention to the serious anthropological character of the crisis of food insecurity. And so such a reading of the Expo theme immediately turned global hunger into a human issue. Hunger comes from a lack of solidarity. Hunger comes from failing to feel, relate and behave like a brother or sister. And like every great human issue, global hunger immediately becomes a moral or ethical issue. It involves the exercise of human freedom: we are free to show this interest or indifference; we are free to exercise goodwill. The choice is no one’s but our own. That is why in the opening ceremony of the Expo, as we just listened to, Pope Francis called for a change of mentality.

So, dear friends, from the lessons of the 2015 Food Expo in Milan, we may now identify two fundamental principles to inspire and to guide action in ensuring food security for a post-Covid world. It is recognition for the *dignity of each person* and recognition for the *common good*.[[2]](#footnote-1) These two principles, when they guide our activity, will help us fashion and change our mentalities, and embrace the challenges toward ensuring food security for all. And so, let us seek to reinforce local and global food supply chains, creating infrastructure, fiscal and digital, to close the gap between small-scale farmers and food markets. Let us elevate the needs of the most vulnerable communities in the world and bring them in the center of international political discussion like the one that is foreseen for the United Nations at the Food Systems Summit. Let us promote secular models of food production and consumption and an efficient use of resources, enhancing local and traditional knowledge to ensure better production and protection of natural resources. Let us reform the present day technological and financial architectures to support the transformation of food systems, in particular today, in the context of the pandemic, we have an unprecedented opportunity to respond to this and to mitigate the malicious systems and effects of all of this. And finally, let us change our behavior regarding food waste, which is deplorable in the extreme.

And so, as we had a chance to observe last time, opening the Food Expo in Milan, from which Pope Francis has spoken to us again, let us now recognize the paradox of abundance: having so much food, and yet experiencing so much hunger and so much need, and through a change of lifestyle and mentality, have to bridge the gap between those who have and those who do not have, so that food may reach the table of all.

Thank you for your kind attention and thank you for the rest of this meeting.

1. FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2020. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming food syste,s for affordable healthy diets. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9692en> [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Cf. [*Compendium Social Doctrine of the Church*](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#Meaning%20and%20primary%20implications), nn. 164-170. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)