



Statement by Sister Alessandra SMERILLI
Head of the Holy See's Delegation

**UN Food Systems Pre-Summit
Rome, July 26-28th, 2021**

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In the face of the tremendous hardship brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, these three days bear witness to a human family that is hungry for change. This change requires our combined courage, our strengths, and a united approach as we walk together in achieving food justice.

Whereas the 3 Cs of *Collaboration*, *Coordination* and *Companionship* could be the antidote to the scourge of hunger in today's world, there are three key drivers that are complicating our attempts to end hunger. These are namely the 3 Cs of: *Conflict*, *COVID-19* and *Climate Change*. Their combined devastating effects on all stages of the food supply chain is alarming. It is estimated that the pandemic alone, through its effects on consumers' purchasing power, reduced small-scale farmers' capacity to produce food and access markets, increased food waste, among others, will plunge 132 million people into acute malnutrition. Of course, the harshest impact of famine will fall on those already made vulnerable or displaced by war, conflict, social unrest, and unemployment[‡].

These numbers reveal a broken system. How can we continue to turn a blind eye to this injustice? As Pope Francis noted on 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* (189), "*hunger is criminal*", since "*food is an inalienable right*".

In this Decade of Action for sustainable development, the ending of hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture must remain key priorities. Behind every statistic there are people struggling against a system that consistently

excludes and places them at a disadvantage. Small-scale farmers working in subhuman conditions and exploited by unfair market prices; indigenous and traditional communities suffering the loss of their natural ecosystems, which are inextricably linked with their cultures and identities; women whose contributions to the food system remain invisible and continue to be marginalized; and children whose growth and prospects for future development are stunted forevermore.

We are currently facing a turning point in history in which our sense of shared responsibility and our sense of belonging to the human family is being challenged. Yet, the current situation can also represent an opportunity to better understand the interconnectedness of systems and to envision new paradigms for their radical transformation. Achieving food justice is not an impossible enterprise. We already have the means and knowledge to embark on this journey together, and this will require sustained political commitment throughout the coming years.

There is an urgent need to reimagine and rebuild food systems with the perspective towards the care for our common home, the eradication of hunger, the respect for human dignity and the service of the common good, demonstrating that we are one human family. We must act now, join forces and build on the solidarity that exists between members of the human family towards a renewed resilient food system that is equitable, just and fair. Without exception.

The COVID-19 pandemic has awoken us to the urgency of pre-existing inequalities. As we look towards a better future, we are reminded how vulnerable and interconnected everyone is, and that “to build a healthy, inclusive, just and peaceful society we must do so on the rock of the common good”ⁱⁱ. With this ultimate objective in mind, an integral ecological approach, that leaves no one behind, can inspire and guide collective action.

Let us be remembered for our decisions to prepare a better future, one in which all individuals enjoy their equal rights to be seated at the table of the common banquet and fulfill their equal duty to contribute to preparing it.

Thank you.

ⁱ Cf. Vatican COVID-19 Commission, 2020, [Healing the Planet by Ensuring the Right to Food for All](#).

ⁱⁱ Pope Francis, [General Audience](#), 9th of September 2020.