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Holy See and the UN: Trying to Speak Up for Human Dignity

Permanent Observer to UN Groups Reflects on Mission

By H. Sergio Mora

ROME, FEB. 29, 2012 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The 35th summit of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), met Feb. 22-23 in Rome.

Among the speakers at the summit were Bill Gates, as well as the Italian Premier Mario Monti; the Minister of Cooperation and Integration, Andrea Riccardi; and the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame.

Archbishop Luigi Travaglino, Permanent Observer of the Holy See at IFAD, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the World Food Program (WFP) was also present. In this interview with ZENIT he explained work of the Holy See in these international organizations.

ZENIT: Why does the Holy See have a Permanent Observer at IFAD?

Archbishop Travaglino: To understand this we need to remember that IFAD was born at the World Conference on Food, held in Rome in 1974. On that occasion, Pope Paul VI made an initial contribution of US\$100,000, thus recognizing the importance of its goal to work for agricultural development and food production, directly financing small farmers and rural communities.

The Holy See has a Permanent Observer to this organization, along with the other Rome-based institutions of the United Nations system: FAO and WFP, which operate in the sector of agriculture and food.

ZENIT: In what way does the Holy See follow the activities of these U.N. entities?

Archbishop Travaglino: In 1948, just three years after the establishment of FAO, the Holy See obtained the status of Permanent Observer; in 1963 it obtained it at PAM and then, in 1978 at IFAD, a few months after the creation of the Fund.

ZENIT: Is the main point the fight against hunger or is there another?

Archbishop Travaglino: The priorities of our presence go back to the affirmation of human dignity, from which also springs the right of every person to food security and, hence, to a situation which enables the poorest (and with this IFAD understands persons who live on less than US\$1.25 a day) to be able to change in a positive way their conditions of life.

ZENIT: What is the Holy See's interest in the work of international organizations?

Archbishop Travaglino: It seems to me necessary to recall here the thought of the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, who, addressing the U.N. General Assembly on April 18, 2008, and FAO's summit on Food Security, on Nov. 16, 2009, indicated the guiding line of the Holy See presence in international organizations: the necessity to meet in a concrete way the demands of solidarity between persons and peoples.

These needs are often forgotten to make room for a pragmatism that, based solely on practical considerations or on the strict needs of the moment, lack a solid ethical foundation.

ZENIT: What is poverty linked to? Just the lack of money?

Archbishop Travaglino: The apparently only material needs of a great part of the world population, which lives under the threshold of poverty, are often linked to the lack of genuinely human foundations in political decisions and economic choices. Hence, the result is often an attitude of closure toward the other or of purely egoistic or national interests.

ZENIT: And in the case of IFAD, and of the summit that has just been held?

Archbishop Travaglino: The meeting correctly highlighted that, besides the grave question of hunger and malnutrition, which concerns more than a billion people, the general situation of rural populations must be considered, whose development is not crucial in order to provide for themselves but also to contribute to resolve gradually the problem of nutrition in the world.

ZENIT: What, concretely, was the work accomplished these days?

Archbishop Travaglino: The need was recalled for an ever closer collaboration between the three agencies based in Rome and between them and different partners that cooperate at the international level, so that an effort of solidarity can be made to guarantee nutrition to all, or at least to gradually reduce the sufferings of the malnourished and starving.

ZENIT: An increase in the funds given to IFAD would confirm this.

Archbishop Travaglino: In fact, the member States gave proof of this, establishing now in a definitive way the restructuring of resources -- the ninth since the institution of the Fund -- which will make possible a worthwhile commitment by IFAD in the forthcoming years. All this despite the limits that the economic crisis and also that the will of the States seem to put sometimes on inter-governmental action.

ZENIT: Are there, therefore, common aims?

Archbishop Travaglino: The objectives delineated and made their own by the member States are at the center of the Holy See's concerns, expressed also recently by the Holy Father's appeals for the crisis in the Horn of Africa and for that which is now imminent in the region of the Sahel.

Therefore, the Holy See will continue to support and encourage IFAD, conscious that the action of this organization entails concord among peoples, international security, the universal common good, even if in the short term it responds to the need to foster conditions for the fight against hunger.

[Translation by ZENIT]