

*Address of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV  
to the Executive Board of the United Nations World Food Programme  
22 June 2026*

Distinguished Authorities,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank Her Excellency Mrs Cindy McCain for her kind invitation to address this annual meeting of the Executive Board of the United Nations World Food Programme. I greet in particular Mr Carl Skau, Acting Executive Director, and Her Excellency Mrs Carla Barroso Carneiro, President of this important assembly. I extend my greetings to the Representatives of the Member States, the distinguished guests at this meeting and the staff of this intergovernmental institution, dedicated to saving lives in emergency situations and providing food assistance amid conflicts and natural disasters. Your institution's commitment resonates profoundly with the Catholic Church's mission to uphold human dignity and to foster fraternity, rooted in the Gospel's call to love our neighbor (cf. *Mk* 12:31). Together, we share the urgent task of confronting hunger and malnutrition, while also tackling the underlying structural causes that sustain them. To meet this task effectively, we must examine the challenges before us, their underlying causes and the paths toward lasting solutions.

Today, crises have evolved from isolated events into persistent realities, marked by prolonged conflicts, chronic food insecurity, economic volatility and growing climate vulnerabilities. This raises a fundamental question: what configuration of the global order is capable of producing, reproducing and, at times, normalizing such conditions? The issue is no longer limited to how to intervene; rather, it extends to understanding why the system constantly produces the very problems it is then forced to correct.

The international order has become increasingly fragmented, arising in part from the crisis of the multilateral system. As I noted recently in the Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas*, "the institutions established to safeguard the concept of a common future for all peoples and a global common good appear to have been weakened" (201). In the absence of a shared ethical horizon capable of sustaining genuine cooperation, the international system has shifted from multilateralism toward "a disorderly and conflict-ridden multipolarism with a prevailing sense of mistrust" (ibid.). Consequently, States have increasingly allocated their resources towards national security, economic growth and domestic stability, disregarding the close link between these issues and multilateral cooperation.

This trend reveals a striking paradox: unprecedented global productive capacity exists alongside expanding zones of extreme vulnerability. The same forces that drive economic growth often exacerbate exclusion and marginalization. Although alleviating human suffering is widely recognized as essential in principle,

humanitarian concerns increasingly risk being relegated to a secondary place among international priorities.

It is precisely within the gap between acknowledgement in principle and prioritization in practice that we witness the progressive bureaucratization of solidarity alongside the quiet commodification of human life. On one hand, humanitarian action is increasingly burdened by bureaucratic procedures that can delay assistance to those in need. On the other hand, access to essential goods, including food, is too often influenced by economic or strategic considerations. As a result, those who do not generate quantifiable value risk becoming invisible.

This twofold dynamic creates a serious ethical challenge: the human person is no longer consistently placed at the center of international action. In this context, it is important to acknowledge that “whereas forms of aid and development projects are obstructed by involved and incomprehensible political decisions, skewed ideological visions and impenetrable customs barriers, weaponry is not” (Francis, *Address to the Staff of the World Food Programme*, 13 June 2016). In effect, conflicts are “fed” more readily than people are nourished. This reality reflects not only operational shortcomings but also a fundamental imbalance in political and moral priorities.

The consequences extend well beyond those immediately affected. More than merely a humanitarian concern, hunger erodes social cohesion, heightens the risk of conflict and fuels forced migration. Moreover, it undermines the capacity of States and societies to build resilient institutions, provide effective education and foster sustainable economic development. In doing so, it perpetuates cycles of fragility that ultimately affect the broader international community.

From this perspective, it becomes clear that humanitarian action is not extraneous to the international order. Rather, it reflects the global community’s responsibility to strengthen solidarity, resist exclusion and recognize the inherent God-given dignity of every person. Beyond managing crises, therefore, international institutions embody a principle of shared responsibility and affirm that the international community is bound together by concern for those in the most vulnerable situations. In this sense, the World Food Programme is more than a political, economic or technical actor; it is a concrete expression of international solidarity. Indeed, where national institutions recede and community networks disintegrate, its presence helps to prevent humanitarian crises from deteriorating into irreversible collapse.

For this reason, a renewed commitment to multilateral cooperation is essential. In an increasingly fragmented and multipolar world, no single State can address global challenges alone. Lasting peace and integral, sustainable human development are possible only through the participation of all, fostered by genuine international dialogue and cooperation oriented toward the common good. Such an approach requires a firm political will capable of transcending short-term perspectives and investing in global public goods. “This goal can only be achieved

through the convergence of effective policies and the coordinated and synergistic implementation of interventions. The call to walk together, in fraternal harmony, must become the guiding principle” (*Visit to the FAO Headquarters in Rome*, 16 October 2025, 6).

In this spirit, I wish to appeal to the governments and peoples of the world to renew and strengthen their commitment, to increase the resources dedicated to combating hunger and its root causes, and to remove the obstacles that prevent aid from reaching those in need. At the same time, such support should also strengthen engagement with the Church and civil society. Reinforcing the capacities of all these actors together will multiply our collective effectiveness in the fight against hunger.

Implementing this appeal effectively requires reducing unnecessary bureaucracy so that transparency and accountability serve people rather than impede assistance. In situations where governments lack effective territorial control or humanitarian access is restricted, trusted local partners become indispensable. The Catholic Church — through parishes, dioceses, Caritas agencies, and other faith-based initiatives — often reaches vulnerable populations in areas inaccessible to international actors. I therefore encourage the World Food Programme and its partners to continue supporting these efforts.

It is equally important to resist the commodification of basic human needs. Food, water and healthcare cannot be subordinated to market considerations or geopolitical interests. Access to adequate food is a fundamental human right grounded in the dignity of every person. Meeting this need not only alleviates suffering but also addresses underlying causes of geopolitical instability. Indeed, food security is an essential component of global and integral security.

In this regard, it is commendable that, alongside its emergency response operations, the World Food Programme extends its work beyond immediate relief to long-term initiatives, such as programs that provide meals to schoolchildren. These investments strengthen education, human development and social resilience, reflecting an integral vision of human development that promotes dignity, opportunity and the well-being of the whole person.

Your Excellencies, dear friends, what is at stake is not only the effectiveness of an agency, but also the credibility of international cooperation itself. Your organization demonstrates that a renewed path is possible; however, it requires the resolve to simplify what has become overly complex, to prioritize what is essential and to ensure that no person is forgotten. For this commitment is grounded in the recognition that every human person possesses an inherent and inalienable dignity that remains intact regardless of circumstance, condition or social status. Rooted in the unconditional and boundless love of God, this dignity can be described as infinite, since nothing can diminish, erase or deny its value (cf. Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas*, 53). It is precisely in our fidelity to this truth that the

humanity of our politics is measured — and, with it, the future of the international community.

With these sentiments, I ask God to bless your efforts abundantly, so that all may receive their daily bread and live in dignity. Please be assured of my prayers for you, your loved ones and those whom you serve.