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Two Black people wearing hair nets and orange aprons smile and stir food in large pots

Chef Elijah Amoo Addo and cook Angel Laryea of Food For All Africa prepare free lunch to reduce food waste and feed those in need in Accra, Ghana, June 3, 2022. (CNS photo/Francis Kokoroko, Reuters)

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In order to eradicate hunger in the world, committed and experienced action must be taken that includes local and traditional cultures and peoples, Pope Francis said.

"We must be very attentive to and respectful of local communities, cultural diversity and traditional specificities, which cannot be altered or destroyed in the name of a short-sighted idea of progress which, in reality, risks becoming synonymous with 'ideological colonization,'" he said in a written statement read July 3 to participants at the 43rd session of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization conference being held in Rome July 1-7.

"For this reason, and I never tire of highlighting this, interventions and projects must be planned and implemented in response to the demands of the people and their

communities; they cannot be imposed from above or from bodies that only seek their own interests or profit," he wrote.

In his message, which was read to the assembly by Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano, permanent representative of the Holy See to the FAO, the pope said, "Many experts today say that the goal of 'zero hunger' will not be achieved within the time frame set by the international community."

"Zero hunger" is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations in 2015. It aims to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture worldwide by 2030.

However, Francis wrote, "the inability to fulfill common responsibilities should not lead us to turn initial intentions into new revised programs which, instead of benefiting people by responding to their real needs, do not take them into account."

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The answer lies in taking into account and actively involving the local communities, families and individuals on the ground who need assistance, he added.

"Millions of people continue to suffer from poverty and malnutrition around the world, due to armed conflict, as well as climate change and the resulting natural disasters," the pope said in his message. "It bears repeating time and again: poverty, inequalities, lack of access to basic resources such as food, drinking water, health, education, housing, are a serious affront to human dignity!"

"The challenge we face demands joint and collaborative action by the entire family of nations," he wrote, and "There can be no room for conflict or opposition."

"This is why the FAO and the other international organizations will only be able to fulfill their mandate and coordinate preventive and incisive measures for the benefit of all, especially the poorest, through a loyal and consensual synergy of consensual and far-sighted thinking on the part of all the actors concerned," the pope wrote.

"Governments, businesses, academia, international institutions, civil society and individuals must make a joint effort, setting aside petty logic and biased visions, so that everyone benefits and no one is left behind," he wrote.