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No eating Saturday

by Dennis Coday

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Last month, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization released a study that said the number of hungry people in the world had reached 1.02 billion. Yesterday, UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, released a report that said nearly 200 million children in poor countries have stunted growth because of insufficient nutrition.

The reports come ahead of a U.N. sponsored world summit on food security in Rome Nov. 16-18. The Vatican announced that Pope Benedict XVI would attend the opening session.

According to FAO director-general Jacques Diouf, the gravity of the current food crisis is the result of 20 years of under-investment in agriculture and neglect of the sector. Directly or indirectly, agriculture provides the livelihood for 70 percent of the world's poor.

A statement from Diouf says, "Poor countries need the development, economic and policy tools required to boost their agricultural production and productivity. Investment in agriculture must be increased because for the majority of poor countries a healthy agricultural sector is essential to overcome hunger and poverty and is a pre-requisite for overall economic growth."

"Despite all the promises made, concrete action on hunger has been lacking," Diouf declared, adding, "In the absence of strong measures another global food crisis cannot be excluded."

The FAO offers some hope for solving the hunger problem. Despite rising global hunger figures, 31 of 79 countries monitored by the FAO have registered a significant decline in the number of undernourished people since the early 1990s.

The U.N. body released a report today, titled *Pathways to Success*, that highlights the progress made by

16 of these countries. Diouf said the report, "through the examples it offers, provides a message of hope -- the battle against hunger can be won. What is required is an unwavering commitment from developing country governments themselves and strong support from the international community."

The report gives answers to policy questions concerning the financial and political investment needed to eradicate hunger.

Diouf also offers a suggestion for a spiritual investment to end hunger.

"We are suggesting that everyone in the world who wants to show solidarity with the one hungry billion people on this planet go on hunger strike next Saturday [Nov. 14] or Sunday [Nov. 15]," FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf told a press conference.

"I shall personally begin a 24-hour fast on Saturday morning," he added.

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