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Structures must change to end food insecurity, nuncio says

by Catholic News Service

United Nations — No one-size-fits-all solution exists to end food insecurity around the globe, but world leaders must act beyond voicing their commitment to seeking food security for all, the Vatican nuncio told a U.N. gathering.

"Hunger is not caused by the lack of sufficient food to feed every person on the planet" but by social structures and failure to prioritize basic human rights, Archbishop Francis Chullikatt said in an Oct. 29 address to a session on agriculture development, food security and nutrition during a session of the U.N. General Assembly.

He quoted Pope Francis extensively in his remarks. For example, he cited the pope's observation that "current levels of production are sufficient, yet millions of people are still suffering and dying of starvation. This ... is truly scandalous. A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being."

The nuncio said that "while improvements in food production remains an important goal, food security will be achieved by all only when we change social structures and when we learn to show greater solidarity toward the poor and the hungry. Hunger is not just a technical problem awaiting technological solutions. Hunger is a human problem that demands solutions based on our common humanity."

The archbishop's remarks, and those of many other countries during the session on agriculture development in late October, addressed the balance of market pressures, the right to food and nutrition and development goals.

Chullikatt observed that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the fundamental right to adequate food, as well as its importance to human development.

The nuncio said governmental reports and national commitments to end hunger are numerous. "Yet in today's world, many nations still face periodic food crisis. Clearly more needs to be done."

Like all forms of poverty, the nuncio said, hunger is caused by exclusion, therefore "we can only eliminate hunger and food insecurity by promoting inclusion. Here we could follow Pope Francis' simple advice: 'Every proposal must involve everyone' and we must leave 'behind the temptations of power, wealth or self-interest' and instead serve 'the human family, especially the needy and those suffering from hunger and malnutrition.'"

Chullikatt said the right to food must be viewed first as a human rights issue. In promoting a life of dignity for all, "we must work for agriculture policies that promote inclusion, respect for the dignity and rights of those still on the margins of today's society, and the well-being of current and future generations."

He touched on the waste of resources, notably in the production and distribution of food.

"Often this waste is due to the fact that wasting food can be more profitable than ensuring that food goes to those in extreme need," he said. "'Whenever food is thrown out,' Pope Francis points out, 'it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor, from the hungry.'"

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Chullikatt said the principle of subsidiarity offers helpful guidance in dealing with food distribution problems.

"This principle recommends that human activities be carried out at the most local and immediate level possible, so as to maximize participation. Larger entities have the responsibility to support smaller ones first, and only take over when these smaller groups are unable to carry out their activities effectively," he said.

"Subsidiarity helps sustain food security because food security consists not solely in giving food to people; it means helping them become self-sufficient so that they provide their own food, either by growing it themselves or by exchanging for food the goods and services they provide," he said.

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