



Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants at the Workshop on: “New Forms Of Solidarity, Towards Fraternal Inclusion, Integration And Innovation” Organized by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences



Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

I wish to express my gratitude to you for this meeting. We are taking advantage of this new beginning of the year to build bridges, bridges that foster the development of a vision of solidarity starting from banks, finances, governments and economic decisions. We need many voices capable of considering, from a multifaceted point of view, the different dimensions of a global problem which affects our peoples and our democracies.

I would like to start with a fact. *The world is rich* and yet *the poor are growing* all around us. According to official reports, this year's world income will be nearly \$ 12,000 per capita. Yet hundreds of millions of people are still plunged into extreme poverty and lack food, housing, medical care, schools, electricity, drinking water and adequate and indispensable health services. An estimated five million children under the age of 5 will die this year from poverty. Another 260 million will not receive education due to lack of resources, wars and migrations. This is happening in a rich world, because the world is rich.

This situation has led millions of people to be victims of trafficking and different forms of modern slavery, such as forced labor, prostitution and organ trafficking. They do not enjoy any rights or

guarantees; they can't even enjoy friendship or family.

These realities should not be a reason for despair, but for action. They are realities that push us to do something.

The main message of hope that I want to share with you is precisely this: these are solvable problems, they are not caused by lack of resources. There is no determinism that condemns us to universal iniquity. Let me repeat it: we are not condemned to universal iniquity. This makes possible a new way of dealing with events, which allows us to find and generate creative answers in the face of the avoidable suffering of so many innocent people; which implies accepting that, in many situations, we are faced with a lack of willingness and decision-making to change things, mainly priorities. We must allow ourselves to be questioned and let the scales fall from our eyes in order to see these realities in a new light, a light that encourages us to act.

A rich world and a vibrant economy can and must end poverty. Dynamics capable of including, nurturing, caring for and clothing the least in society can be generated and promoted rather than excluding them. We must choose what and to whom to give priority: whether to favor humanizing socio-economic mechanisms for the whole of society or, on the contrary, foment a system that ends up justifying certain practices that do nothing but increase the level of social injustice and violence. The level of wealth and technology accumulated by humanity, as well as the importance and value that human rights have acquired, no longer allow for excuses. We must be aware that we are all responsible. This does not mean that we are all guilty, no; we are all responsible for doing something.

If extreme poverty exists in the midst of – also extreme – wealth it is because we have allowed the gap to widen and become the largest in history. These are almost official data: the fifty richest people in the world have assets equivalent to 2.2 trillion dollars. These fifty people alone could fund the health care and education of every poor child in the world, either through taxes or through philanthropic initiatives, or both. These fifty people could save millions of lives each year.

The *globalization of indifference* is being called "inaction". St. John Paul II called it "structures of sin". These structures find a favorable climate for their expansion every time the common good is reduced or limited to certain sectors or, in the case that brings us together here, when economics and finance become ends in themselves. It is the idolatry of money, greed and speculation. It is this reality, coupled with the current exponential technological growth, which increases, at a rhythm never seen before, the speed of transactions and the possibility of producing concentrated earnings without these being tied to production processes or even to the real economy. Virtual communication favors these types of things.

Aristotle celebrates the invention of money and its use, but firmly condemns financial speculation because "money itself becomes productive, losing its true purpose which is to facilitate trade and

production" (Politics I, 10, 1258 b).

In a similar way, and following reason illuminated by faith, the Church's social doctrine celebrates the different forms of government and the banks that were often created to protect them: it is interesting to study the history of pawnshops, the banks created to encourage and collaborate – when they fulfill their purpose, which is, ultimately, to seek the common good, social justice, peace, and the integral development of every individual, every human community and all people. However, the Church warns that these beneficial institutions, both public and private, can become structures of sin. I am using the definition of Saint John Paul II.

Structures of sin today include repeated tax cuts for the wealthiest, often justified in the name of investment and development; tax havens for private and corporate earnings; and, of course, the possibility of corruption by some of the world's largest companies, not infrequently in tune with the governing political sector.

Every year one hundred thousand million dollars that should be paid in taxes to fund health care and education, accumulate in tax havens, thus preventing the worthy and sustained development of all social actors.

Poor people in heavily indebted countries endure overwhelming tax burdens and cuts in social services as their governments pay debts contracted in an insensitive and unsustainable way. In fact, the public debt often contracted to boost and encourage the economic and productive development of a country, can become a damaging factor that ruins the social fabric. It ends up being oriented towards another goal.

Just as there is co-irresponsibility with regard to this damage caused to the economy and society, there is also an inspiring and promising co-responsibility for creating a climate of fraternity and renewed trust that embraces the search for innovative and humanizing solutions as a whole.

It is good to remember that there is no magical or invisible law that condemns us to freezing or paralysis in the face of injustice. And even less an economic rationality that presupposes that the human person is simply an accumulator of individual benefits unrelated to his condition of being social.

The moral demands of Saint John Paul II in 1991 appear surprisingly current today: "The principle that debts must be paid is certainly just. However, it is not right to demand or expect payment when the effect would be the imposition of political choices leading to hunger and despair for entire peoples. It cannot be expected that the debts which have been contracted should be paid at the price of unbearable sacrifices. In such cases it is necessary to find – as in fact is partly happening – ways to lighten, defer or even cancel the debt, compatible with the fundamental right of peoples to subsistence and progress" (Centesimus annus, n. 35).

In fact, even the Sustainable Development Goals approved unanimously by all nations recognize this point – it is a human point – and urge all peoples to "Assist developing countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability through coordinated policies aimed at fostering debt financing, debt relief and debt restructuring, as appropriate, and address the external debt of highly indebted poor countries to reduce debt distress" (SDG, 17.4).

This must consist in the new forms of solidarity that unite us today, which unite us here, if we think about the world of banking and finance: in helping to develop populations left behind and leveling countries that enjoy certain standards and levels of development and those that are unable to guarantee the bare minimum to their populations. Solidarity and economics must aim to unite, not to divide, with a sound, clear awareness of co-responsibility.

In practice it is necessary to affirm that the greatest structure of sin, or the greatest structure of injustice, is the war industry itself, since it is money and time spent to serve division and death. The world loses billions of dollars every year in armaments and violence, sums that would end poverty and illiteracy if they could be redeployed. Truly Isaiah spoke on behalf of God for all mankind when he foretold the day of the Lord when "they will beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into sickles" (Is 2: 4). Let's follow him!

Over seventy years ago, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights committed all its Member States to take care of the poor in their lands and homes and all over the world, i.e. in our common home, which is the whole world. Governments recognized that social protection, basic income, medical care for all and universal education were inherent in fundamental human dignity and, therefore, in fundamental human rights.

These economic rights and a safe environment for all are the most basic measure of human solidarity. And the good news is that while in 1948 these goals were not immediately achievable, today, with a much more developed and interconnected world, they are. Progress has been made in this direction.

You, who have kindly gathered here, are the world's financial leaders and economic experts. Together with your colleagues, you help establish global tax rules, inform the global public about our economic situation and advise the governments of the world on their budgets. You know firsthand what the injustices of our current global economy are, or the injustices of each country. Let's work together to end these injustices. When multilateral credit entities advise different nations, it is important to keep in mind the high concepts of fiscal justice, the public budgets responsible for their indebtedness and, above all, effective support for the poorest in the social fabric, in order to turn them into the main actors. Remind them of their responsibility to offer development assistance to poor nations and debt relief for highly indebted nations. Remind them of the imperative to stop man-made climate change, as all nations have promised, so that we don't destroy the foundations of our common home.

A new ethics presupposes being aware of the need for everyone to work together to shut down tax havens, avoiding the tax evasion and money laundering that rob society, as well as to inform nations of the importance of defending justice and the common good above the interests of the most powerful companies and multinationals, which end up suffocating and preventing local production. The present time demands and requires moving from an insular and antagonistic logic as the only authorized mechanism for the solution of conflicts, to a different logic capable of promoting the interconnection that favors a culture of encounter, where the solid foundations of a new financial architecture are rebuilt.

In this context, in which the development of some social and financial sectors has reached levels never seen before, it is so important to remember the words of the Gospel of Luke: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded" (12, 48). How inspiring it is to listen to Saint Ambrose, who follows the Gospel when it says: "It is not anything of yours that you are bestowing on the poor; rather, you are giving back something of his. For you alone are usurping what was given in common for the use of all" (Naboth 12:53). This is the principle of the universal destination of goods, the basis of economic and social justice, as well as of the common good.

I am delighted with your presence here today. We celebrate the opportunity of being able to co-participate in the work of the Lord that can change the course of history for the benefit of the dignity of each person today and tomorrow, especially the excluded, and for the benefit of the great good of peace. We humbly and wisely work together to serve international and inter-generational justice. We have boundless hope in the teaching of Jesus that the poor in spirit are blessed and happy, because to them belongs the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. Mt 5: 3) which begins already here and now.

Thank you! And I would like to make a request and it is not for a loan: do not forget to pray for me, because this work that I have to do is not easy at all, and I invoke all my blessings on you and your work.