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Pontifical Academy of Sciences
Working Group on “Bread and Brain, Education and Poverty”
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Word of Welcome

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

With greetings from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, I am glad and honoured to open this Working Group of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, dedicated to a study of the topic: “*Bread and Brain, Education and Poverty*” and wish you great success.

The four terms of the title, artistically set out as a chiasmus, causally relate *Hunger and Poverty to Education*. They refer to the situation, both tragic and scandalous, of millions of impoverished human beings who lack **nourishment** for body, mind and spirit, that is, both food and education.

Indeed, *Bread and Brain, Education and Poverty* reminds us that the intrinsic correlation between brain development and nourishment inspired the close sequence of the first two Millennium Development Goals, namely, the elimination of extreme poverty and hunger, and universal primary education. In response, *school feeding programmes* have sprung up around the globe, in developed and developing countries.

Furthermore, these days of study embody a wish to apply the fruits of *brain activity*, including *scientific research, biological and other technologies* and *social innovation*, to food production and to poverty alleviation.

Describing these various senses, dear Friends, provides a small taste of how ramified and related our topic is with other areas of study and concerns of human existence. Ultimately, the topic broaches the issue of basic *rights and needs*, the issue of *human dignity* and the issue of *justice and peace*. Indeed, for Pope Benedict XVI, “*the elimination of world hunger has also, in the global era, become a requirement for safeguarding the peace and stability of the planet.*”¹

Malnutrition of mind and body – lack of food and lack of learning – is a horrendous double helix. It must be addressed with great urgency, but not only by sound scientific research but also by solid social policies, in order to achieve real improvements in education, food

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, §27.

production and distribution, sustainable agriculture and nutrition security. As a coefficient of development or under-development, it must be addressed, above all, with a rediscovered sense of Christian humanism, characterised by solidarity, by a sense of brotherhood.²

The Pontifical Academy of the Sciences has invited an impressive interdisciplinary group of international experts to explore these issues with both competence and serious commitment.

My prayer is that your lively **conversation** at this Working Group may contribute to the essential larger **dialogue**, as *Gaudium et Spes* taught: “The Church sincerely professes that all [people], believers and unbelievers alike, ought to work for the rightful betterment of this world in which all alike live; such an ideal cannot be realized, however, apart from sincere and prudent dialogue.”³ This dialogue must address many obstacles of different kinds that are retarding a fair global solution to the problems of poverty and hunger, whose main root is “lack of deep thought”⁴ and finally the *lack of brotherhood among persons and peoples*.

Let us bring our best energies to the common task in the greatest spiritual freedom, as Pope Francis insisted in his Message to the Food and Agricultural Organization: “To move forward constructively and fruitfully in the different functions and responsibilities involves the ability to analyze, understand, and engage, leaving behind the temptations of power, wealth or self-interest and instead serving the human family, especially the needy and those suffering from hunger and malnutrition.”⁵

As we read in the Preface to the Working Group’s Programme, in the Lord’s Prayer we address not “*my*” but “*our*” Father, we plead not for “my” but for “our” daily bread. By saying “*our*” and so praying on behalf of everyone who shares a single common origin in God our Creator, we engage ourselves to take up the task of producing and distributing food and of making education available to all his sons and daughters, to all our brothers and sisters.

May the Church thus accompany the poor, “providing for their most urgent needs, defending their rights and working together with them to build a society founded on justice and peace.”⁶ And may a new double helix of nutrition and learning become part of our human makeup, thanks to this Working Group whose labours we entrust to the Almighty.

² Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, §19, with reference to Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, § 66.

³ *Gaudium et Spes*, § 21; cf. § 40.

⁴ *Caritas in Veritate*, § 19.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Address*, 38th Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 20 June 2013, § 3.

⁶ Benedict XVI, *Vespers*, Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, São Paulo, Brazil, 11 May 2007.