

Pope urges world leaders to tackle hunger at UN summit

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI urged international leaders to turn their attention to the growing problem of world hunger as they deal with the global economic crisis.

Looking ahead to a U.N. financial summit in New York June 24-25, the pope said the meeting should be carried out “in a spirit of wisdom and solidarity, so that the current crisis can be transformed into an opportunity.”

The goal should be to “promote an equitable distribution of decision-making power and of resources, with particular attention to the number of poor, which unfortunately is increasing,” the pope said June 14 at the Vatican.

The 82-year-old pontiff, who was preparing to release an encyclical on social and economic justice, said he wanted to remember in a special way the hundreds of millions of people who suffer from hunger.

“This is an absolutely unacceptable reality, and has been difficult to control despite the efforts of the past decades,” he said.

He said he hoped the upcoming U.N. conference and other international agencies would “make strategic choices – sometimes not easy to accept – that are necessary to assure basic nourishment and a dignified life for everyone, now and in the future.”

U.N. officials said the summit was aimed at identifying emergency and long-term responses to lessen the effects of the current economic crisis, especially on developing populations. It was expected to discuss transformation of international financial structures, a topic that has already prompted debate among richer and poorer nations.

Pope Benedict was preparing to publish his third encyclical, tentatively titled “Caritas in Veritate” (“Love in Truth”), in early July. It was expected to treat Catholic social teachings and apply them to a wide array of current problems, including

poverty, war and environmental destruction.