

Senator's

by Sen. Earl Hastings

Ottawa

Notebook

First, a statistic: at a very conservative estimate, 460 million people are suffering from malnutrition today. A better word is starving, since another half-million people in the world simply go hungry every day.

Second, the true look of a statistic: the terrible pictures on our television screens, in our newspapers, of the look of death and the death of hope.

We all have seen those pictures and they burn themselves into our uneasy minds.

It is almost too big to comprehend, this spreading famine, this threat of mass starvation, the worst world food crisis in several generations. Canadians know that it is real, it is here, and it ranks with some of the worst scourges of man.

When all the statistics have been dropped onto the page, all the bushels of grain and grams of protein toted up, all the world's population growth duly noted, all the soaring prices inscribed, the page cannot take all that and it clears. A simple equation comes on. Too little production of food sending world prices soaring in a time of high inflation anyway, matched against too many people in countries too poor to pay those prices. The equation equals disaster.

But even the equation is remote. The truth on the page is in a picture. One starving village. The mother bathing her dead child. From that it becomes easier to imagine the stagnation of vast communities sunk into lethargy. And easier to appreciate, in our own comfort, that a true crisis is with us,

requiring world organization, mobilization... and generosity. We suddenly can see that "the spectacle of two hundred million malnourished children, and of nursing mothers suffering on a similar scale, makes a mockery of the ideals professed by every society."

Allan MacEachen, said those words, at the World Food Conference in Rome. Our External Affairs Minister said much more, and that is what I want to talk about to you.

I know from my own mail, and from the press, and from a blizzard of letters that Canadians have written to the Prime Minister, that most of you want Canada to be generous with emergency food aid and with longer term assistance to help developing countries produce more of their own food.

Mr. MacEachen told the 130 countries gathered in Rome that Canada will commit itself to providing one million tons of food-grains in aid each year for the next three years -- as a minimum.

One million tons -- that is, 36,700,000 bushels -- is fully one-tenth of the 10 million tons of foodgrains per year that are said to be needed in aid.

Canada, promising more than her proportional amount toward the proposed minimum target, is committing herself for three years in the hope that other countries will do the same and contribute to greater stability of supply and better planning.

The one million tons is about double the 495,000 tons

Canada had committed to the Food Aid Convention in this current year. It is 200,000 tons above the five year average, including this year, of 800,000 tons of Canadian food grain aid per year. That average includes years of especially high food grains aid by Canada, for instance 1,200,000 tons in 1971-72. We should also remember, that Canada this year, and in other years, has been providing more food grains than it actually committed to provide.

If you look at Canada's total food aid programme in dollars, it totalled about \$104 million in 1970-71, \$86 million in 1971-72, \$108 million in 1972-73 and \$139 million in 1973-74.

These figures will rise markedly, since Canada is committed to provide one million tons of grains a year whatever the world price of grain -- and the prospects are for continued high world prices. Moreover, Mr. MacEachen said in Rome that Canada will "increase substantially" the amount of other food aid we provide, such as oilseeds, dairy products, fish and so on. That kind of aid has been running at an average of about \$25 million a year over the last five years.

Mr. MacEachen said that Canada recognizes that a world food strategy, if it is to work, "will require the mobilization of vastly greater resources for

agriculture both nationally and by the international community."

Canada, therefore, was allocating \$50 million of its development assistance programme to be used specifically on ways that can help make an impact on the current critical situation.

Canada also is pledged to increase its emphasis on supporting the development of increased food production in the developing countries.

Contrary to popular belief, food production has not been dropping in these countries. It has been rising rapidly. But it has not been increasing as fast as have the mouths to feed. And the balance, that which the countries have to import, is becoming so expensive that they simply cannot pay. It is all the more urgent, therefore, that they become more and more self-sufficient in food.

Mr. MacEachen stressed that Canada will accord "a high priority" to assisting the development of new agricultural and fisheries capacity in countries that are serious about truly improving their food production.

This area has comprised from six to 12 percent of Canada's total bilateral assistance programme over the

years and we are prepared to significantly increase that proportion. This is, for the longer run, the key to the world problem, and it is in this area that Canada's performance over the coming years will be measured.

Canada is committed now to supply about 20 percent of its food aid through multilateral channels, principally the World Food Programme. Our commitment has been \$15 million a year for two years ending this year. With Mr. MacEachen's statement in Rome, this commitment will go to somewhere near \$40 million. The importance here is that the World Food Programme has greater flexibility than do individual countries, to make quick responses with large amounts of grain to areas of urgent need.

Mr. MacEachen said Canada will help pursue the idea of a world food grains bank, and will take part in the proposed international Early Warning System for managing and maintaining stocks.

Canada is taking an active part internationally in trying to secure better trading conditions for developing countries so that they can better pay their own way. Mr. MacEachen committed Canada to continue to try to secure additional benefits for the trade of developing countries "within a non-discriminatory trading framework."

We will have to see what this emergency food crisis conference in Rome, with other international actions, produces. Canada, at least, is playing its part.

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