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AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PROBLEMS IN THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The following is part of a recent statement by Mr. Paul Martin, Secretary of State for External Affairs, at the Development Assistance Committee High Level Meeting in Washington, D.C:

...As a major producer and commercial exporter of foodstuffs, Canada has a vital interest in the relationship between future world demand and supply of food, and also in the implications of the food situation for the economic progress and well-being of the developing countries. The trade aspects are, of course, being discussed elsewhere; in addition, FAO and the World Food Programme are doing important work on food aid. Nevertheless, the DAC has a distinctive role to play in examining the place of agriculture in economic development and in encouraging adequate responses on the part of both donor and recipient countries....

AID FOR SELF-DEVELOPMENT

The importance of increasing agricultural productivity in the developing countries cannot be overemphasized. It is obvious that the only satisfactory solution lies in helping these countries to acquire the necessary knowledge, technology, resources and will to feed themselves. The Secretariat has performed a useful service in summarizing the task before us. The paper has rightly pointed out the need for effective tools, fertilizers, pesticides and seeds, as well as for related facilities such as the construction of rural roads, the provision of electricity, equipment for irrigation and drainage, and the establishment of suitable marketing arrangements. The members of this Committee can do a great deal to provide the necessary knowledge and what is now referred to in the jargon as "inputs". However, we must recognize that the most difficult problem may be the human one — how to persuade farmers rooted in tradition to accept new agricultural technologies and motivations.

The main burden of these changes must fall on the developing countries themselves. As donor countries, we must seek to help in every way we can. Technical assistance is a vital ingredient. In Canada we are actively examining additional ways of increasing and improving our contributions of human resources and we will give the highest priority to requests from developing countries for such assistance related to agriculture or fisheries as we are competent to provide. In addition, we have, over the years, provided significant assistance in other forms, such as fertilizers. In the coming years, we are prepared to supply increased amounts of fertilizers to developing countries. To this effect, programmes are being developed which will, we hope, facilitate forward planning by both Canadian industry and the developing countries concerned.

Perhaps I might note two areas in which the useful Secretariat paper might be a little more explicit. There is first the need of a proper balance in the application of agricultural inputs. As the experience of the Indian subcontinent has made clear, there are dangers in seeking to increase irrigation without paying equal attention to the important problem of drainage. Similarly, there is little point in promoting agricultural productivity through the use of fertilizers unless adequate credit and marketing arrangements are available. In short, there is no magical formula for increasing food production; we must ensure that our approach is balanced and realistic.