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Statement by H. E. W. A. Irwin, Canadian Representative
in the Second (Economic and Financial) Committee
on the Provision of Food Surpluses to Needy Peoples Through
the United Nations System (Agenda Item 29)
Monday, October 24

Mr. President,

It is a privilege to table formally in this Committee draft resolution A/C.2/L.459 co-sponsored by Canada, Haiti, Liberia, Pakistan, United States of America and Venezuela on the question of the provision of food surpluses to needy peoples through the United Nations system. This is a subject which my Delegation considers to be one of the most important, if not the most important, of those to be considered at this year's session of the Second Committee.

Canada has repeatedly urged that international action be taken to provide food, which is in surplus in some parts of the world, to needy and hungry peoples in other lands. It is one of the great anomalies of our time that there are widespread areas in desperate need of food while at the same time there are other areas where foodstuffs are in abundant surplus. Surely the international community has developed a sufficient sense of responsibility and adequate experience with the techniques of international cooperation to find some way by now out of this dilemma. The co-sponsors have joined together to submit draft resolution A/C.2/L.459 in an effort to have the Assembly consider this tragic human problem as a matter of great urgency. In his speech to the General Assembly on September 26, Prime Minister Diefenbaker re-emphasized Canada's determination to seek international action on this question, stating: "I believe that much must be done on behalf of food deficit countries, first to help them in their hour of need and then to help them raise their own levels of production. This to me is the responsibility of the United Nations as a whole to meet this challenge." He went on to say "We envisage a food bank to provide food to member states through the United Nations. Such a scheme would require the establishment of concerted machinery which would take into account established patterns of trade and marketing and co-ordinate the individual surplus disposal to improve the effective utilization of wheat."

It must be admitted that progress in this matter has thus far been slow and to us in Canada, and no doubt even more so to the food deficit countries, disappointing. On a number of occasions in recent years, the Prime Minister of Canada has urged that specific programmes be established to make available surplus foodstuffs for consumption in those parts of the world where food shortages occur. As far back as December 1957, Prime Minister Diefenbaker, speaking in Paris, referring to the needs of hungry peoples, stated that "The conscience of the free world will not accept a situation where half mankind is well fed and the other half is starved". He advocated the establishment by some of the more fortunate countries of something in the nature of a food bank whereby food would be made available for distribution among those countries that were struggling for economic advance but which were held back by low or inadequate nutritional levels among their populations.