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- Sahel development plan adopted at Ottawa meeting, 1
- Quebec/Newfoundland ferry service, 2
- Wages - Canada/U.S. comparison, 2
- A medal for Mr. Strong, 3
- U.S./Canada talk agriculture, 3
- Towards prevention of coronary heart disease in high-risk patients, 3
- Winnipeg has lowest food costs west of Ottawa, 4
- News of the arts - international exhibition, bilingual technical dictionary, 5
- Air agreement with Finland, 6
- Government/labour pioneer pact, 6
- News briefs, 6

Sahel development plan adopted at Ottawa meeting

Representatives from eight West African nations, and from aid-donor countries and organizations, recently adopted a long-term economic development strategy and a program of action for the drought-prone region of the Sahel, one of the poorest areas in the world.

The strategy, which is aimed at ensuring self-sufficiency in food for the area, was approved by the Club of the Friends of the Sahel, meeting in Ottawa at the invitation of the Canadian Government from May 30 to June 2. (See also *Canada Weekly* dated April 20, 1977, Page 3.)

Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), is one of the countries that provided assistance to the Sahel countries in their fight against drought and will continue to do so in conformity with Canadian Government policy to give priority in its aid programs abroad, to the less-developed countries. It was therefore in a spirit of international solidarity with the Sahel countries, and in co-operation with the other aid donors, that Canada welcomed to Ottawa the members of the Club for its

Far from home, a herdsman and his son wait, their livestock now dead. Like many victims of the West African drought they do not know their family's fate, for they took the animals into less arid areas in search of water and food.



IDRC photo

second plenary session since it was set up in Dakar, Senegal, in March

The Sahel

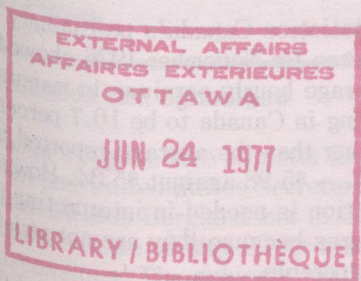
The Sahelian zone is composed of five countries: Mauritania, Mali, Upper Volta, Niger and Chad. From the point of view of geographical similarities, however, the zone also includes Senegal, Gambia, the Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia.

This vast area of inland territory has encountered the greatest difficulties in trying to recover from the 1973 drought, the effects of which will apparently not be eliminated for a whole generation. This kind of disaster is not new, for it is estimated that the Sahel has been hit by 21 long periods of drought since the sixteenth century. Opinions vary about why the phenomenon recurs, and about the hypothesis that the 1968-1974 drought is linked to a trend toward an even drier climate and an increase in the area covered by

desert.

The gross domestic product for five of the Sahelian countries, namely Chad, Niger, Mali, Upper Volta and Mauritania, is about \$2 billion, giving a *per capita* annual income of approximately \$110 to some 20 million inhabitants (slightly less than the population of Canada). But account should also be taken of the regional disparities within the zone: between \$69 and \$100 in Upper Volta, Mali, Niger and Chad, but \$170 in Mauritania because of its mining industry.

Experts are disturbed by the debts that the Sahelian countries have accumulated since the 1968-74 drought. In the space of a few years Chad's debts have increased tenfold and those of Niger sevenfold, and some countries are on the verge of bankruptcy. In early 1976 repayment of debts exceeded the amount of aid received.



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