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NOTES FOR A STATEMENT BY

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SECOND COMMITTEE OF THE

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"FOOD AID"

Mr. Chairman,

Opening the Fifth Ministerial Session of the World Food Council in Ottawa last month, Canada's new Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, described hunger as "an affront to human dignity". There are now more hungry in the world than the estimated 455 million at the time of the 1974 World Food Conference. Even worse ravages may come. Yet the world's fields and oceans produce enough food to feed mankind. In this light, Mr. Clark said, "nature is no longer the problem: the problem is man".

The world food situation is a central international issue for Canada. Our country is viewed as a "breadbasket", with food production many times our own needs. Yet there is hardly any issue which can arouse as much interest, concern, and anger among ordinary Canadians as food shortage and food maldistribution in any part of the world. Nor is this interest just that of producers and traders, although food is and will remain a vital export sector for our country. Canadians are glad to see our food aid reaching hungry people, but our producers have no interest in maintaining dependence on food aid or even essential food imports. Rather they want to see adequate commercial demand in a world where more people and countries are able to feed themselves and sell their own products.

It is in Canada's and other advanced industrial countries' basic interest to support stepped-up investment and a dramatic increase in food production in the developing countries. This will help these countries meet the nutritional needs of their growing populations and promote their role as equal partners on the world stage. It is clear that the increasing demand for food grains is greater than can be achieved by North American farmers alone. Meeting these demands will require huge investments in both developed and developing countries.

The whole field of development co-operation makes most sense to Canadians when it is aimed at promoting greater self-sufficiency, especially in food, for the poorest and most vulnerable people. This kind of "aid", successfully pursued, will be supported by Canadian taxpayers, no matter how difficult our economic conditions at home. For this reason, Prime Minister Clark was able at the World Food Council to commit his government without reservation to continue to contribute \$400 million every year to agricultural and rural development through bilateral and multilateral channels. Non-governmental organizations and agricultural research groups are also vital channels for this co-operation.

Although Canada is a significant element in the world food system, we recognize that we are just a part of a much bigger picture. It is this picture we should be critically scrutinizing, five years after the international community met, in an atmosphere of crisis, at the World Food Conference.

At the international level, despite record cereal stocks, we have failed to build an international system of global food security capable of preventing the recurrence of a crisis like that of 1972-74.

Canada is committed to the objective of an international grains agreement which would provide the basis for such a security system. We remain convinced that world food security must be based on international arrangements which ensure stable and adequate returns to producers and thus ensure that the necessary investment in increased production capacity and improved infrastructure are made.

Because the world community has not yet found reasonable compromises between the different producer and consumer nations, the world's poor remain critically vulnerable. We want the international community to be ready with an adequate response when the 1971 International Wheat Agreement expires just one year and eight months from now. To help provide some of the "bridging" aid required, the Canadian government has agreed to negotiate a new Food Aid Convention separately from a Wheat Trade Convention, although the new Food Aid Convention would remain linked to the 1979 International Wheat Agreement. As indicated during the wheat negotiations, Canada intends to provide 600,000 tons of grain annually to the new Food Aid Convention. We remain very conscious that total food aid needs are still greater than total commitments, and we urge other states which are able to do so to increase their contributions in this area.

In the long-term perspective, there are some grounds for encouragement in the doubling of international development assistance for food production between 1973 and 1977, with multi-lateral agencies accounting for the greatest part of this increase. However, in its Report, the World Food Council noted with alarm that current and projected levels of investment in food production and distribution fall far short of assuring the food needs of the world's growing population.

In the developing countries themselves, the twin challenges of production and distribution remain, in spite of substantial effort and notable improvement in some countries.

Production growth in the Third World as a whole has barely kept pace with population increases and on average shows no improvement over the 1960s. For those countries which have achieved substantial improvements in production and distribution, it is a striking achievement, since these goals often go against the social grain and are vitally influenced by a great number of economic and other conditions.

Yet I have to say, Mr. Chairman, that many countries have fallen short of the improvement they could have achieved. Despite the calls of many international conferences and the

declarations of many delegations here in support of according a high priority to food and agricultural questions, public investment in agriculture in many developing countries continues to fall far behind the importance, whether measured in terms of Gross National Product or employment, which agriculture plays in the economic and social life of those countries. In not a few developing countries, declining or stagnating agricultural production is more a function of political choice than of climatic or other natural circumstances.

One constraint on food and agricultural development has undoubtedly been the inadequacy of national food management and planning capability. In its report, the World Food Council placed particular emphasis on the use of national food sector strategies which it regarded as "a promising instrument for food deficit countries". Canada believes strongly that such long term national food strategies can play a key role in mobilizing increased energies and resources, both from developed countries, but more especially, from within developing countries, toward more self-reliant policies in favour of food and agricultural development.

We are confident that such strategies, by assuring resources are directed towards well-planned and effective projects, will increase political support in developed countries for the transfer of additional resources to assist in meeting these objectives. Canada was, therefore, pleased to announce at the Ottawa meeting that we are setting aside a special fund of \$2 million to assist developing countries to prepare long term national food strategies for the 1980s. We are hopeful that other countries will be able to join Canada in making available funds for this purpose.

Both the World Food Council and the Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development stressed the need for more direct action by governments to overcome malnutrition and achieve greater equity in food distribution, and to ensure that increased production of food reaches the hungry and malnourished poor. At the Rome Conference in July, it was President Nyerere of Tanzania who outlined five essential conditions for rural development in Third World countries, regardless of the differences in their systems. He stressed that creating these conditions always takes strong political will and is never painless. "In practically all developing countries," he said, "these things require a revolution in the present patterns of government expenditure and of taxation."

As we prepare together an international development strategy for the 1980s, it is inescapable that these internal changes will be as essential a part of the bargain as will structural changes at the international level. The record of

nutritional status (not just food production), and the record of rural investment, land reform, and employment will provide the key bench-marks of development progress for poor people and for all of us.

Mr. Chairman, Canada has been and remains a strong supporter of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Agricultural Research Institutions, and we commend them for the excellent work they are doing.

The WFP, in particular, is an example of a United Nations' success story. When it began as an experiment in 1962, member countries pledged \$90 million. For 1979 and 1980, Canada alone will contribute \$95 million for each year. This contribution reflects Canada's concern for the current world food situation, our awareness of our international responsibilities, and our approval of the record of this programme. We like the programme because its objectives are to get food to those who need it most and because it has been most imaginative in utilizing food aid as direct assistance for agricultural development, for improving nutrition, for encouraging more children to attend school, for food scholarships to be used at vocational training centres, for getting governments involved in sound welfare programmes. We were, of course, very pleased that the United Nations and FAO saw fit to appoint a Canadian, Gerry Vogel, as Executive Director of the WFP; we cannot fail to commend him and his staff for the excellent work they are doing.

Mr. Chairman, developed countries can help provide a healthy external environment for food and agricultural development in developing countries, and we can contribute skills and resources where requested to reinforce well-planned national efforts for socio/economic transformation. In the end, however, we remain only junior partners in the tasks of development and combating hunger.

Canada will be prepared to continue to help meet emergency food needs, as in the terrible crisis now gripping Kampuchea. We should have an important role in helping to bridge transitional food gaps and underwrite food security machinery. More than anything, however, I believe that in the coming decade Canadians will be impatient to concentrate our resources on helping those countries which are unmistakably committing their own political will and their own material investment to feeding themselves. Surely we can agree that the objective of eradicating hunger must come first, from the viewpoint of basic needs, human rights and international co-operation for development.

In the general debate in this committee a few weeks ago, my colleague from Jamaica referred to a "convergence of rhetoric" and deplored the absence of what he perceived as the political will required to translate apparently agreed objectives into action. In no sector is the divergence between rhetoric and action more evident than in food and agriculture. It will be difficult to generate the political will required to increase the flow of resources from developed countries in the absence of political will in developing countries to accord a high priority to the food and agricultural sectors.

The time has come for rhetoric and action to converge. This requires a concentration of political will on the part of both developed and developing countries. Man now has the means to eradicate hunger. Let us build together a better world where each of its citizens enjoys the essential right to food, without which the enjoyment of other human rights is denied.