



Statements and Speeches

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IN THE WAKE OF THE WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE -- FOOD PRODUCTION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

An Address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, to the Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting on Food Production and Rural Development, London, England, March 4, 1975.

...It is fitting that Commonwealth members, committed as they are to the social and economic betterment of their peoples, should confront the interlinked problem of food production and rural development -- and determine how the Commonwealth can assist.

It is essential that any proposals for practical collaboration should benefit member countries directly and reinforce the spirit of Commonwealth collaboration that heads of government defined at the meeting in Ottawa in 1973.

With the increasing attention being paid to food production and rural development throughout the world -- especially in the wake of the World Food Conference --, this meeting must ensure that any activity undertaken through our Commonwealth supplements and reinforces -- and does not duplicate -- activities being undertaken elsewhere. Within the framework of existing bilateral programs between Commonwealth countries the meeting may well recommend new and potentially fruitful areas of co-operation which could influence policy decisions.

One step that could help in this co-operation is the possibility of creating a Food and Rural Development Division within the Secretariat. Ministers will doubtless wish to examine this suggestion. Should productive areas of operation for such a division emerge from discussion, Ministers could recommend to governments a particular role for the division. In my view it could provide an information clearing-house for member governments and an advisory service to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. As well, there should be involvement, as appropriate, of the existing Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux in whatever recommendations are made -- a practice that would ensure maximum involvement by pertinent Commonwealth organizations.

Let me turn now, briefly, to the World Food Conference and review the follow-up action that is being taken internationally and by Canada.

It was understandable that many delegates to that conference from developing countries were preoccupied with the urgent short-term problems arising from a rapidly deteriorating world food situation. This made it difficult to place proper emphasis on the resolution of longer-term food problems and of increased agricultural production -- especially in developing countries -- that represented a major objective of that conference.

Nevertheless the conference did achieve agreement on a number of important institutional issues:

- (1) The establishment of a World Food Council.
- (2) The establishment of the FAO Committee on World Food Security.
- (3) The setting-up of a Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programs.
- (4) The creation of a global information and early warning system.
- (5) The establishment of a consultative group on food production and investment of the IBRD, FAO and UNDP.
- (6) The creation of the framework for an international fund for agricultural development.

Discussions are now taking place or are scheduled in the very near future to advance each of these matters. In keeping with Canada's role at the conference, we intend to take part in these discussions in the spirit that was developed at the Rome Conference. In the three months or more since the conference, we, in Canada, have been occupied translating our pledges into realities.

We did pledge one million metric tons of food grain annually for each of the next three years to help overcome the short-term food shortages. Plans are nearly completed for the allocation of this grain to bilateral recipients and multilateral organizations. In keeping with our pledge to channel at least 20 per cent of our food-aid through multilateral agencies, a significant portion of the one million tons will be made available to the World Food Program.

We also pledged to make available immediately \$50 million of aid funds to assist some of the most seriously distressed countries. This total sum has been fully committed to the provision of fertilizers, and food-aid shipments are now being made. We

are deeply aware that measures of this kind are but the first steps on a long road. This conference is a further step down that road to improving the economic well-being of the developing world. I think this conference must concentrate on the basic long-term priorities -- the increase in food production, the improvement of nutrition, and the advance of rural development. This conference is concerned with efforts to improve the lives of the rural poor who represent some 40 per cent of the total population of developing countries -- about 750 million persons. Canadian efforts will concentrate on increasing the productivity of rural people by enhancing the means of production at their disposal.

To help meet demands of this magnitude we have been engaged in Canada in developing a new broad strategy for Canadian development assistance, which is now in its final stages. It is intended to provide, among other things, new guidelines that should result in a greater capacity to respond to the changing priorities of developing countries.

In addition, other policies of government that affect Canada's relations with developing countries are also being re-examined with a view to ensuring a consistent approach to the development of a stable and equitable world economic environment.

Within the broad dimensions of this strategy, we have been reassessing our development-assistance programs in order to enlarge them and make them more effective in the renewable-resources sector. Through our bilateral and multilateral aid programs, we have been involved in a wide range of activities in this sector -- for example, the provision of fertilizer, research in dryland farming, water-resource evaluation, the development of wheat farming and beef and dairy projects, and the development of storage and bulk-handling facilities. We can also extend our activities in fisheries and forestry.

In agriculture, Canada is strong in the production of cereals such as wheat, oats, rye, barley and maize, and in oil-seed crops such as rapeseed, sunflower seeds and soy-beans, as well as starch crops like potatoes. We have a strong technology in dryland agriculture. Most of our cereal crops are grown in areas with under 20 inches of annual rainfall. In other agricultural technologies, we are good in the soil sciences, animal-breeding, animal nutrition, and crop storage and processing. We are using these strengths as a back-up for our international development work. There are many projects and programs drawing upon our expertise in these areas. Here are just a few examples:

In India, there are Canadian scientists working with their Indian colleagues adapting Canadian dryland technology to a variety of Indian soil and climatic conditions. They are also working on scaling down large-sized Canadian minimum-tillage implements to small mechanical or ox-power systems. In Tanzania, Canadian scientists and practical farmers are opening new lands to wheat-farming. In Lesotho, we are helping to sort out areas suitable for a variety of oil crops and, if successful, we shall help with the technology for growing, harvesting and processing.

But we have our limits. We manufacture relatively few agricultural implements and practically no tractors. One of our biggest constraints is the fact that we do not have many professional agricultural personnel available for development work, even though we are placing more emphasis on training and recruiting for work abroad. Specialized manpower is a great lack, though perhaps we may yet find a way to tap the extensive knowledge that exists among our farmers. Finally, although we are the largest *per capita* donors of food aid in the world, there are clear limits to the amount of agricultural land in Canada located in a climate suitable for crop or animal production.

In fisheries, Canada has a highly-developed capability in biological research, exploratory fishing, resource management and quality control. Fisheries-development planning and resource management are two particular areas in which Canada has been involved in projects in several Commonwealth countries in Asia, the Caribbean and Africa.

We know there are limitations not only to our food production capability but to the extent to which Canadian experience is immediately relevant to the problems of rural development in developing countries. From Canadian experience, we have learnt that rural development is damnably difficult. As I have indicated, we are re-examining our international assistance operations in an effort to make them meet more effectively the needs of our partners in development. What we hope to hear at this conference from our developing-country partners is some plain talk about their priorities. We want to match our response more closely to their needs....

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