



Statements and Speeches

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THE EMERGENCY IN AFRICA

Statement by Stephen Lewis, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, to the Fortieth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, November 7, 1985.

Mr. President. The emergency in Africa is not over. In spite of the arrival of bountiful rains in some areas and the harvesting of bumper crops, countless numbers of Africans are still starving or hungry or malnourished. There is still misery. Famine still stalks many lands. The situation now is vastly better than it was one year ago, but much more must yet be done.

At incomparable human cost, the world has learned some lessons since the start of the African emergency; let us resolve that they are not forgotten, and that hereafter, we will put in place a series of responses, policies, and programs which, collectively, will make an equivalent catastrophe impossible.

Canada believes that while the emergency remains the imperative, we must increasingly emphasize follow-up measures for the international community so that a rehabilitation program can be established with two major long-term goals: (a) to help Africa better anticipate and better manage any future emergency situations; and (b) to put Africa on an economic path that will reverse the continent's recent decline and ensure that sustained development is achieved for the future.

These two goals will only be achieved by an immediate and prolonged commitment of resources, accompanied by extensive policy changes, and close co-ordination between the international community and African countries. The task is daunting. It requires single-minded political will over a very long haul.

The African emergency has had a stunning impact on this world. It has restored the milk of human kindness to even the most obdurate of cynics. It has brought a massive global outpouring of emergency assistance to Africa. The international system has shown that it can respond with speed, compassion, and generosity. In food aid alone, during 1984-85 donor countries will have shipped an estimated 11.7 million tonnes of cereals to Africa. To put it in stark relief, food aid to Sub-Saharan Africa will account for one half of total cereal imports and one sixth of total cereal production in the region. What more morose statistics are necessary to illustrate the impact of drought on agricultural production, as well as the recuperative antithesis — the strong support of the world community?

Agriculture is, however, only one facet of the critical situation in Africa. The emergency's more lasting effect has been to dramatize and exacerbate already serious economic problems and to constrain, drastically, economic development. Over-all, the Economic Commission for Africa calculates that total output *per capita* on the continent dropped 10 per cent from 1980 to 1984, and *per capita* food production is now only 94 per cent of what it was ten years ago. One could be clinical about it and note that this lack of real growth in output obviously has adverse consequences on balance

of payments, and greatly accelerates the accumulation of debt. One could equally be emotional about it and note that the figures constitute a monumental economic calamity.

Without any inclination to moral preachiness, it is necessary to acknowledge that the root causes implicate us all. Whether it is misguided domestic policies, low rates of investment (particularly in agriculture), poor management, high interest rates, or stagnant world commodity trade, the breakdown in Africa's primary economic underpinnings has greatly added to the tragedy. The challenge for corrective action is to reverse the decline in total output, and to deal realistically (some would say courageously), with all these interlocking economic problems.

Our immediate goals in addressing the African crisis should be early recovery and the establishment of a foundation for longer-term development. Early recovery means amongst other things, taking advantage of the current good rains by providing tools and fertilizers, as well as increased food storage capacity. Longer-term development requires a co-ordinated response to bridge the transition from emergency to security. A number of useful suggestions have been made by various groups, including the International Development Research Centre in Canada, the Expert Summit Group on the African Emergency, and the Commonwealth. Perhaps I might highlight sensible and relevant measures:

- (a) improving and integrating the early warning systems of various multilateral agencies and African countries;
- (b) strengthening the response system for emergencies through better management, based on the hard lessons learned to date;
- (c) striving for truly effective co-operation between donors and development agencies on the one hand and the governments and peoples of Africa on the other;
- (d) integrating food aid with national food production policies;
- (e) utilizing resettlement packages, and other innovative direct assistance strategies to provide immediate assistance to those most in need.

The goals of helping Africa to better manage future emergencies and to reverse declining development are not difficult to state. To attain them, however, will require Herculean efforts and unprecedented resources over the long term. The international community knows its responsibilities; but when all is said and done, the major effort and resources must be found in Africa. No continent can live by aid alone. Which resources are we talking about? Quite simply: environmental, financial, policy and co-ordination. All of them exist indigenously, and must be exploited imaginatively. Let us examine them more fully for a moment.

(1) Environmental resources obviously refer to soil, water, grasslands, and forests. This is the great inheritance of Africa and it is being devastated in the short term. The result? Desertification, increased severity of droughts, unplanned population movements, and lowered crop yields. The degradation of

the rural environment is the result of an imbalance between human activities and the environment itself, not to mention the lack of priority accorded the rural sector in most African economies.

African countries and international donors must pay more attention to the environment at both the regional and project level. At this moment in time, there is a conference on desertification in Dakar, and there is also the Report of the Summit Group of Experts on the Crisis in Africa proposing a similar conference to be held in Paris in February 1986. Canada looks forward to the results of these meetings in order to better co-ordinate our own work in this area. In fact, Canada's assistance program to the Sahel has, as one of its three focuses, the stabilization of vegetative cover precisely to protect this delicate environmental balance.

(2) Financial resources include domestic holdings such as private and public savings, as well as foreign aid and export earnings. We are encouraged by the Organization of African Unity Summit Meeting Declaration of 1985 which called for increasing agriculture's share of total national investment to between 20 and 25 per cent by 1989. Obviously however, agriculture cannot stand alone — all national investment rates must be increased.

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) estimates that the savings rate for non-oil exporting countries in Africa barely reached 15 per cent throughout 1980-84. That's simply not high enough to encourage growth. The question of export earnings, debt and capital inflows plays an important part in determining the resources available for investment, as well as being an integral part of the international economic environment. Somehow this environment must be improved in order to provide more opportunities for African development.

Since 1980, total official development assistance (ODA) flows to Africa — including the Organization for Petroleum-Exporting Countries — has reached over \$10 billion per annum — and this during a time of recession for developed country economies. The ODA figure accounts for 48 per cent of total local investment in the non-oil exporting Sub-Sahara African countries. That kind of extravagant dependence on development assistance makes no sense. Clearly more genuine local investment, and a redirection of resources towards agriculture, are needed. It calls for much closer co-ordination between African governments and donors.

(3) Policy formation should itself be treated as a key "resource". If the natural and financial wherewithal are not used effectively, Africa won't turn the corner from crisis management to long-term growth and development. Accordingly, it is imperative that domestic economic policies facilitate necessary adjustment, and that sectoral policies encourage increased investment and production through pricing arrangements, land use, agricultural inputs, transportation and marketing.

(4) Co-ordination, too, can be thought of as a key "resource" without unduly stretching the meaning of the word. Co-ordination between donors, multilateral agencies and African governments can reduce duplication, avoid bottlenecks and enhance the use of funds. While African governments must take the lead role, it is the responsibility of all to ensure that co-ordination is raised to the level of holy economic writ.

It is with these "resources" of environment, finance, policy and co-ordination that the great long-term problems of Africa must be attacked. Bluntly stated, these problems include:

(a) *Food production* — subsistence agriculture does not allow for the accumulation of significant food surpluses. Policies to increase real incomes for those who produce food inevitably stimulate food production. However, more than just agricultural pricing policies have to be changed; there is a complex of other factors, including transportation, crop storage and farm inputs. Moreover, stepped-up agricultural research into local food crops is an important factor in increasing yields. All of these aspects, taken together, can begin to build an indigenous agricultural base of sufficient viability to withstand future deprecations.

(b) *Infrastructure* — the first phase of the UN Transport and Communication Decade for Africa has, according to the ECA, been encouraging. The second phase calls for an investment of \$18 billion. Infrastructure must play an indispensable role in increasing Africa's ability to respond to future emergencies, as well as expanding over-all output. We would go so far as to say that in certain instances, the rehabilitation and maintenance of existing infrastructure should take priority over new investment.

(c) *Human resource development* — the use of human resources, particularly in agriculture, is central to the proper management of the industry. In particular, acknowledging the key role of women in development, upgrading the value of their work, and integrating their contributions to production and income generation are essential goals. This is one of the great challenges for contemporary Africa. And the goals must be met if any real and sustained progress is to be accomplished in Africa in the long term.

(d) *The 3 per cent per annum population growth* — this growth rate is an integral part of the food *per capita* equation. A long-term decrease will lessen the impact of future emergencies.

Let me turn, once again, to the central focus of our debate here today. Canada firmly believes that the UN system, working with multilateral agencies, bilateral agencies and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), has an absolutely vital contribution to make in responding to the current emergency in Africa. Already, looking toward the future, the international community through the UN has formulated a number of coherent long-range plans of action for Africa, particularly through the World Bank and its six point program. The Special Fund for Sub-Saharan Africa has received over \$1 billion, of which sum, I am pleased to say, Canada has contributed more than \$100 million. (As an aside, I should also like to add for the record, that Canada has increased its bilateral disbursements to Africa for the year 1985-86 by almost exactly 50 per cent over [those of] 1983-84. The bilateral sum has now reached \$430 million. Total Canadian resources going to Africa will reach over \$850 million in 1985-86). What we and others must ensure, however, is that the funds are effectively employed to deliver the maximum benefit. In the short-term, that means saving lives; in the medium- and long-term it means building — carefully, painstakingly — an invulnerable base for the future survival of the continent.

The African countries themselves now have a more thorough assessment of their own desperate difficulties, and at the same time have already developed an enhanced capacity to respond to these difficulties.

The international community, particularly the western nations, have also realized their own responsibility to provide swift and massive emergency assistance on a scale hitherto unimaginable. Clearly, both Africa and the international community are now looking beyond the immediate crisis to a sustained collaborative effort, the success of which will allow Africa, including all of its countries, communities and peoples to develop. Amidst the ruin of the human experience there lies a potential triumph of the human spirit.

It would seem odd to make this speech without addressing the question of the proposed Special Session of the General Assembly on the African Emergency.

Canada happily supports the proposal. It is our hope that the debate, whenever it comes, will address the two overriding central issues: cushioning the impact of any present or future emergency; and consolidating the long-term strategy for the continent.

The special session in its time, and in its particular way, will then be re-enforcing and encompassing the many initiatives and policies already embraced or in process right across the United Nations system. After all, we have an excellent tentative blueprint in place: The Declaration on the Economic Crisis in Africa.

We look for concrete, practical results which can be supported by all, and which will be of permanent, incontestable benefit to Africa.

I have one final thing to say, because it is irresistible that it be said.

I well remember, with others, that historic meeting in a committee room downstairs on December 17, 1984, when the Office of Emergency Operations for Africa was launched. I well remember the pervasive gloom but stoic determination of those who graced the dais on that occasion — the Secretary-General himself, Mr. Stern of the World Bank, Mr. Souma of the Food and Agriculture Organization, and of course Bradford Morse, in whose hands the looming massive operation was placed. I well remember the comments of my colleagues; apprehensive, pessimistic, bewildered, frantic. I well remember a host of subsequent meetings in 1985, chaired by Mr. Morse with Mr. Strong at his right arm, where member countries, particularly donor countries including Canada, fretted and cavilled and stewed over money, staff complements, duplication, co-ordination, delivery, and the thousand other unnerving minutiae which sapped confidence and raised legitimate anxieties.

But above all I well remember, and observe with exhilaration, that the Office of Emergency Operations refused to be traumatized, buckled down to the job and performed magnificently.

This last year has surely been one of the UN's finest hours. The Secretary-General exercised his mandate with inspiration, focus and clarity. The international community was galvanized. And that little Brad Morse operation, acting in the name of us all, collaborating with donor countries, recipient countries, NGOs, and all the other relevant UN agencies; co-ordinating on the ground the distribution of the aid; overcoming what seemed to be in so many cases insuperable logistical difficulties — that Office

of Emergency Operations — demonstrated that the United Nations, when mobilized, can save hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of lives.

There is a tendency in this place to measure the UN's legitimacy solely in terms of political issues. Here is a case, however, when legitimacy and purpose are confirmed by the quality of our response to the human predicament.

It has all been memorable. It is a fitting reaffirmation of the fortieth anniversary.

What we must now resolve is that 40 years hence, the African continent will reflect a multitude of thriving economies where the human condition flourishes.