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OVERCOMING THE WORLD FOOD PROBLEM

A Speech by the Honourable Paul Martin,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
at the Young World Food and Development
Seminar, Toronto, September 15, 1967.

I cannot commend too highly the purpose which brings us here today and the individuals who have made this conference possible. One of the greatest forces in the world today is the strength and vitality of our young people. One of the greatest challenges, as awesome in its way as the threat of nuclear destruction, is the spectre of a world that cannot feed itself. The sponsors of this conference and of the regional seminars which have preceded it, have found a practical way of bringing the vitality, enthusiasm and idealism of youth to bear upon the problem of hunger in the world.

This has been the centennial project of Massey-Ferguson and it has enhanced a proud Canadian name. No finer way could have been found to celebrate our country's hundredth birthday.

The success of this conference will be seen in the stimulation of agricultural activity in all parts of the world and will represent another major achievement in the solid record of progress established by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. I well remember that day, almost 22 years ago, when the constitution of the FAO was signed in Quebec, based on the hope of the Atlantic Charter that a peace would be established which would afford assurance that all men in all lands might live out their lives in freedom from want. It was a brave hope. It has not yet been realized.

Despite billions of dollars spent on foreign aid and gifts of food, despite the energy and dedication of such organizations as the Freedom-from-Hunger Campaign, and despite years of activity by all the international agencies which have applied themselves to this field, the fact remains that there are more hungry mouths in the world today than ever before in history.

Malnutrition is the dark angel which hovers today over millions of young children in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It appears before their birth and carries them to an early grave, with hunger their constant companion in the years between. Famine strikes all too frequently upon the plains of Asia. We can admire the fact that hungry nations have made progress in the last 22 years; were they not handicapped by crippling difficulties, they could take great forward strides.

The statistics of the world food crisis read like a gospel of despair. We have been told that more lives will be lost through starvation in the next ten years than in all the wars of history. More than one-fifth of the 2,200 million inhabitants of the developing countries are hungry and more than half suffer from malnutrition. Grain stocks, once considered excessive in certain major exporting countries such as Canada, have been drawn down drastically in the past five years and are now deemed to be at minimal levels. If present trends are not altered, the 13 developing countries with major cereals shortages could experience a cereals deficit of as much as 30 million tons a year by the mid-1970s. These nations, already suffering chronic balance-of-payments deficits, might have to spend \$7.5 billion in foreign exchange in 1975 to import foodstuffs, with a consequent slowing-down in significant areas of economic development.

Statistical surveys, based upon total food produced per person, suggest that there is no world-wide shortage of food in terms of calories or protein at the moment. But in the developing countries, where two-thirds of the world's people live, there is overwhelming evidence of undernutrition and malnutrition.

The world's increasingly serious nutritional problem arises from the uneven distribution of the food supply among countries, within countries and among families with different levels of income.

The conclusion is inescapable. The deficiency is one of human organization. The people of our world need leadership to escape from the vicious bonds of hunger.

We have the land. With imaginative schemes of irrigation and flood control, with the application of fertilizer and the latest advances in technology, millions of acres can be brought into fruitful production. We have limitless possibilities for technical advance -- in developing the immense resources of the sea, new cereal strains, herds and flocks that give more meat, more milk. We have the human resources -- abundant human resources. Each year, for example, thousands of overseas students in our Canadian universities demonstrate their ability and their determination to apply their broader knowledge to the problems of their native lands. Given the capital and the tools, there is no doubt that they can do the job. For the first time in history we have the potential to solve this age-old problem. But we have to generate the will to use those skills to the benefit of mankind.

We are told that social changes are required but that these must evolve gradually. We know that centuries-old systems of land use do not always produce the greatest benefit from the land but that old methods of farming, which have served generations, cannot be altered overnight to suit the dictates of an alien science.

But surely, in facing the disastrous consequences of continued hunger, more devastating in its effect than the mushroom cloud of a nuclear explosion, surely we must become impatient, surely we must demand an end to the apathy which acts as a brake on human progress.

Leadership is the essential ingredient. Only men and women charged with the urgency of the situation can give the inspiration and direction which will lead us away from hunger and sickness to plenty and health. Those not prepared to meet the challenge of development are not fit to be in positions of

responsibility. Leaders must have the foresight and wisdom -- not only to deal with recurrent emergencies but to lead their people to solve the central problem of our time.

The dimensions of the world food crisis may not strike the public as being as dramatic as the threat of war. The average citizen, saturated with statistical data, finds it hard to become excited about things which may happen in 50, ten or even five years' time. But hunger and its companion ills cannot be ignored. They are breeding, today, the crises and conflicts that could face each one of us tomorrow.

A continued imbalance between the affluent societies and those who never have enough to eat places great strains on a world already subject to dangerous pressures. If we are to ease those strains, we must act decisively and wisely before present opportunities are lost.

In Canada, we are preparing ourselves for the role which we must play as a great agricultural nation. We have made major contributions to the world's food shortages -- we gave more than \$100 million in wheat last year and pledged ten per cent of the resources of the World Food Programme.

This year we have some 60 agricultural advisers abroad in 17 countries -- practical men, applying themselves to practical problems. They are developing new rust-resistant strains of wheat in Kenya; helping to fight rinderpest disease in West and Central Africa; to establish new pasture-land in Korea and new agricultural education facilities in Thailand. Other Canadians, sponsored by non-governmental organizations, are helping to drill for water in the famine-stricken areas of India and are taking part in the Asian drive against food losses through vermin and rot.

Our capital-assistance projects bearing on agricultural or fisheries development in 20 countries total almost \$15 million. Apart from our food-aid programme, we plan to ship overseas in 1967 and 1968 more than \$22-million worth of fertilizer and fertilizer components.

But we know that this is only a part answer to the long-term problems of agricultural insufficiency. There is much more to be done.

In concert with others, we must provide the schools and cultural institutions that make rural life rewarding for young men and women with ambition and spirit. We must make sure that when the land is ready, machinery, fertilizer, seed and stock are available -- that techniques and skills are transferred in time.

We must go further. In co-operation with others we hope to achieve advances in international commodity-price agreements and the arrangement of markets to provide improved access for the primary products of less-developed nations. The individual farmer must have the assurance of a reasonable return on his industry and investment.

Our solemn duty is to devise ways and means by which the bread of this world can be put into the mouths of its people. To this task all human endeavour must be applied, for, if we fail, all our endeavour will be pointless.

Our aid programme in Canada is being reshaped to meet this challenge. Despite the improvements in communications and the close relations which Canada has had with its partners in development, not enough is known about the way in which our special experience and capacities can be wedded to overseas need. We are moving to remedy this situation. Next month, we shall send a team of Canadian agricultural specialists to India. Their assignment is to define areas in which Canada, with its specific skills, experience and products, can mount better programmes of assistance. It is our hope that other nations may follow our lead and that those who require assistance will welcome this initiative.

Despite 20 years of co-operation, our two worlds are still too far apart. We in the economically-developed world must bring home to our peoples the true gravity of the situation. Those who are struggling against overwhelming odds in the developing world must take fuller advantage of the opportunities offered by economic co-operation.

Government aid programmes alone cannot meet the whole challenge of underdevelopment. Total mobilization of available resources is required and, to this end, government must look to its private sectors for the application of economic capacity and private initiative.

Here are vast resources of capital and scientific knowledge. Ways must be found to apply this capital and knowledge to problems far beyond our own borders. There are many scientifically-trained young people eager to serve overseas in the cause of international co-operation for development.

Those who guide the machinery of government and those who work in the experimental laboratories look to youth to provide a spur. Canada gives its full encouragement to its young people who wish to serve the cause of development, whether through government programmes or the energetic activity of our young volunteers. All over the world, young people must be given the opportunity to bring fresh ideas to bear upon the old, old problems.

You are the most deeply involved; you have the most to lose if the battle against hunger is not won; you are the best prepared to fight the battle.

But it is not to you alone that we must look. All who have responsibilities of leadership must accept the challenge.

The world has no place for neutrals or bystanders in this war on want. We are all involved. We shall all suffer if that war is not won. We shall all benefit from victory and it is my hope that we shall see the fruits of that victory in this generation.

S/C