

External Affairs
Supplementary Paper

Proposal to Establish a "World Food Programme"
No. 61/20

Statement made by Mr. Gordon Aiken, M.P.,
Representative of Canada in the Second Committee
of the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Chairman,

I should like to open my remarks with an expression of my Delegation's sincere appreciation for the generosity of the Committee in agreeing to proceed today with consideration of this urgent and important item.

I should like, secondly, to offer the congratulations of my Delegation to the distinguished Secretary-General and to the distinguished Director-General of the FAO for the stimulating and challenging addresses with which they so fittingly introduced the discussion of the World Food Programme.

We are today embarking on the final stage of our journey, begun a year ago, to develop a new international and multilateral approach to the tragic problems of hunger and malnutrition in so many parts of the world. Let us rise to our responsibility and press on to achieve something truly effective and worthy of the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman, this is a particularly happy day for my Delegation, which is privileged to recall the proposal made on September 26, 1960, by the Prime Minister of Canada, the Rt. Hon. John G. Diefenbaker, to the General Assembly for the creation of a World Food Bank.

Members of this Committee are already aware of the action taken at the 1961 Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome. Acting on developments set in motion by General Assembly Resolution 1496 (XV), the Conference established the outlines of an initial experimental three-year programme. This programme, and the means to put it into operation, are our primary concern today.

Turning now to the draft resolution contained in Document A/C.2/L.617 sponsored by Cameroun, Denmark, Liberia, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, USA and ourselves, I would like to refer firstly to the annex attached to the resolution. This annex contains the principles unanimously adopted by the entire membership of the FAO, which includes the vast majority of the countries represented here today. These principles were the result of four weeks of diligent effort at FAO to arrive at a workable and effective programme. For this reason, we have in the first operative paragraph of the resolution proposed that this Assembly accept the principles agreed upon by the FAO, and in so doing approve the establishment of the World Food Programme. Shortly stated, the resolution provides for the establishment of an initial experimental programme for three years of approximately \$100 million contributed on a voluntary basis, to be undertaken jointly by the UN and the FAO with the co-operation of appropriate inter-governmental bodies. The plan provides for contributions in the form of appropriate commodities, acceptable services and cash.

An intergovernmental committee of 20 members with an appropriate balanced composition is to be elected, 10 members by ECOSOC and 10 members by the FAO.

Subject to the approval of the FAO Council and ECOSOC, it will be the task of the Intergovernmental Committee to draw up the conditions and procedures for the establishment and operation of the programme. In the administration of the programme, attention is to be paid to establishing adequate and orderly procedures on a world basis for meeting emergency food needs and emergencies inherent in chronic malnutrition, as well as to assisting in preschool and school feeding and implementing pilot projects with the multilateral use of food as an aid to economic and social development. The Committee is also charged with ensuring that adequate protection is given to commercial interests generally and to producers in developing countries.

The remainder of the paragraphs in Part I of the resolution are, generally speaking, provisions required to make the programme operational on the part of the United Nations. These include directions to the Intergovernmental Committee which are intended to give it the widest measure of discretion and freedom to develop the conditions and procedures on which the proposed programme should be established and operated, subject, of course, to the final approval of ECOSOC and FAO Council.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 specifically approve the establishment of the Intergovernmental Committee and request ECOSOC to elect 10 members thereto, taking into account the need for balanced representation. Paragraph 2 also approves the establishment of a joint UN/FAO administrative unit.

Paragraph 4 provides for a review of the composition of the Intergovernmental Committee before January 1, 1963. Paragraph 6 calls for a review by ECOSOC at its thirty-third session of the proposed procedures and arrangements. Paragraph 7 requests the Committee to report to ECOSOC and FAO Council. Paragraphs 8, 9 and 10 provide for setting up a pledging conference and urge early attainment of the financial objectives of the programme. Paragraphs 5 and 11 provide broad directions to the Intergovernmental Committee. Paragraph 12 recommends that the resident representatives be kept informed on the activities of the Programme and Paragraph 13 provides for a general review of the Programme not later than the eighteenth General Assembly.

Part II of the resolution recognizes that the World Food Programme constitutes a significant but modest step towards the objectives outlined in General Assembly Resolution 1496 (XV) and holds out the possibility that in the future, on review by all concerned, broader objectives in the use of food may be considered.

Mr. Chairman, the other point I wish to emphasize is that, as the Canadian Delegation stressed at the FAO Conference, the Canadian Government does not regard the operations of the proposed World Food Programme as a surplus disposal activity. I think this must be said because I should not wish to leave any doubt in the minds of the members of this Committee about this point. While it is true, of course, that we expect foodstuffs, some of which may be surplus, to play a very large role in the Programme, I would stress that we have no thought that countries which do not have surplus food supplies should be expected to contribute financially or in any other way to a programme to help the surplus capacity countries out of difficulties they may now or in the future experience. I hope the Committee will forgive me labouring that point, but it is a fact that my Government sincerely hopes that this Programme, starting modestly as it is bound to, will in

time grow in scope and effectiveness during the coming decade, to the point where it will be able to play a most important role in contributing to the solution of hunger and chronic malnutrition in the world today. We have urged, and will continue to urge, that the cash component of the contributions will be at least one-third, in order that the Programme may be flexible enough to meet the requirements of those in need, not just an outlet for what surplus producing countries may have available. No surplus producing country can expect to gain the support of non-surplus countries and commercial exporters for this Programme, unless this is the aim.

Mr. Chairman, may I conclude my remarks with a brief summary of some of the basic considerations which my Delegation hopes will be reflected in proposals put forward by the Intergovernmental Committee of Twenty.

In the first place - and perhaps most important - we believe that the proposals which they put forward should be such as to attract the widest possible support. From the very beginning, the World Food Programme must be truly multilateral, both in terms of membership and of financial support.

Furthermore, we believe that in its initial experimental stage, the Programme should proceed with a judicious blend of caution (as it gains experience and strength) and zeal (as it attacks the most urgent and pressing problems which it is called upon to solve). Let us not court frustration by being too ambitious in our initial operations. In our view, immediate attention should be given to making adequate and orderly provision for coping with emergency and near-emergency needs. We should also start to experiment with pilot projects in those areas of economic and social development which will assist countries to raise their average food consumption and general levels of living.

As stated in Part II, we believe that, as conditions, experience and financial resources permit, the United Nations and FAO might give further consideration to the scope and limitations of a truly multilateral programme.

Thirdly, it is in our view imperative that in the operations of the World Food Programme the commercial interests of food-exporting countries and those performing related services must be fully protected, as indeed must those of agricultural producers within the recipient countries themselves. It would, Mr. Chairman, be impossible to lay too much stress on this consideration.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the Charter of the World Food Programme should reflect our recognition of the fact that whatever may be done through the United Nations system to alleviate hunger, the ultimate and lasting solution to the problem of hunger lies in an effective acceleration of economic and social development which will allow the developing countries not only to increase their own food production and consumption to levels which they can sustain, but also to purchase more food through normal channels of international trade.

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