



Statements and Speeches

No. 74/13

THE ELIMINATION OF MAN'S OLDEST SCOURGE AND MOST PERSISTENT ENEMY -- HUNGER

Speech by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, to the World Food Conference, Rome, November 6, 1974.

* * * *

This conference is engaged on a mission to seek the elimination of hunger -- man's oldest scourge and most persistent enemy. Together with the Law of the Sea Conference in Caracas and the World Population Conference in Bucharest, it is part of a process of reassessment of man's global relationship to the resources that sustain him that may yield us a new consciousness of the global responsibilities carried by every nation and people. We in Canada will not shirk these responsibilities, and are willing to play our part in furthering those common endeavours that bear promise of helping to produce a lasting freedom from want for all mankind -- but the endeavours will remain barren if they are not truly common and truly sustained.

Hunger must today be tackled at every level -- at the family, village, province, country and region as well as the global level -- for no unit of society bears any graver responsibility than that of feeding its people. In our present world community we are everywhere faced with an agonizing awareness of starvation wherever it occurs; and finding means to harness production around the world to alleviate it poses a challenge to our ingenuity as well as to our compassion. We in Canada recognize that our farmers can grow more than they do at present. To that end, we have recently taken several policy initiatives that will ensure not only that producers will have more stable and satisfactory returns but that they will have a better transport and storage system to get their products to market. We believe that these initiatives will permit Canadian agriculture more nearly to reach its potential. We must, however, remember that, whatever food may move internationally, most men for the foreseeable future will inevitably remain dependent on the food produced near to their neighbourhood markets.

It is for this reason that Canada emphatically supports the development of increased food-production capacity by developing countries as the key to an anti-hunger strategy. Where opportunities for efficient food production exist, my Government stands ready to accord it a high priority in our assistance programs.

Canada has always been responsive to requests for assistance in this area. We are now carefully re-examining the skills and resources that may exist in Canada suitable for assisting the development of new agricultural and fisheries capacity in developing countries to determine practical ways of making them readily available. We therefore intend to have a matching response for countries that set about energetically to mobilize their internal food-production resources and give a high development priority to efficient food production.

We know from experience that expanding food production on a secure basis is not easy. It demands adaptation of land and water, technology, research, finance, modernized storage and transport facilities, marketing organizations, planning, and government services -- all of which may require changes to traditional modes of life. Increased production is also facing barriers arising from supply shortages of certain "inputs", notably nitrogenous fertilizers. No *deus ex machina* will remove these impediments overnight, and each country must come to terms with them in its own way. Where Canada can help to make these problems more manageable it will, and it will strive to see access to "inputs" maintained internationally on an equitable non-discriminatory basis.

The situation of the "vulnerable groups" in food-deprived areas is a reproach to us all. The spectacle of 200 million malnourished children, and of nursing mothers suffering on a similar scale, makes a mockery of the ideals professed by every society. The malnourished children of today must somehow be enabled to become the well-springs of tomorrow's prosperity. This conference should determine upon effective ways for directing a greater volume of food to these groups and make them priority recipients under international food-assistance programs. UNICEF and the World Food Program, not to mention the voluntary organizations that form so much of the vanguard in this struggle, must be given the resources to develop programs to this end that are truly effective. Canada intends to play its full part in this effort.

We cannot ignore the fact that in the immediate future there will be a substantially-increased demand for food imports in a number of countries that cannot pay for them. The food-aid programs of many donor countries have hitherto been facilitated by the existence of "surplus stocks", which are now non-existent. Food aid is consequently falling off just when it is needed most. Yet the people fed by "surplus stocks" cannot be counted "surplus people", and their needs cannot be written off. Canada has seen its commitment to these programs as a commitment to international solidarity and to human compassion. We do not intend to abandon them now. Food-

aid donors, and indeed all prosperous countries, have an obligation to maintain these flows while emergency conditions persist, and should expand them if possible. Conversely, the recipients, past and future, have an obligation to take every reasonable measure to augment the availability of food locally, in order that food need not be diverted from those who are unavoidably hungry to feed those who are avoidably starving.

Canada accepts the main elements of a long-term food-aid policy that have been recommended to us. I shall now set forth the specific response of the Canadian Government to these recommendations: First, the Canadian Government accepts the conception of forward-planning; it has decided to make its own commitment for the next three years. Second, it agrees with the view that, if the eroding effect of sudden price increases on the levels of food-aid is to be avoided, the best way of pledging food-aid is in physical terms -- that is to say, in quantities of food rather than in amounts of money. Third, Canada supports the setting of a minimum target for world aid flows of ten million tons of food-grains a year. Fourth, in pursuance of these principles that we have accepted, Canada hereby commits itself to supplying an average of 1,000,000 tons of food-grains annually for each of the next three years. In pledging this more than proportional amount towards the total target, we have had in mind that it is a minimum target and that we are facing a situation of extraordinary gravity. We should hope that other traditional and new donors will subscribe with us to the objective of surpassing the minimum target. Fifth, Canada is prepared to increase substantially the allocation of commodities other than food-grains for food-aid purposes. Sixth, we accept the proposition that multilateral food-aid programs have operated to good and beneficial effect, and that their continued effectiveness must be buttressed by adequate resources. Accordingly, we are prepared to channel approximately 20 per cent of Canada's food-aid through these multilateral programs. In order to carry out this commitment Canada will make a supplementary contribution to the World Food Program.

This is the substance of Canada's response to the situation of acute distress that is confronting us.

In the longer term, there is clearly a need to define more closely the circumstances where food-aid is appropriate, and avoid the disincentives it causes in indigenous production. There is merit in suggestions that grain stocks for emergency relief be set aside on some consistent international basis, and arrangements made for their rapid mobilization when needed, and we shall help pursue this question.

Canada has long been a proponent of grains arrangements that would augment world food security, and of other measures to this end. At last year's FAO conference, Canada supported the principle of a voluntary undertaking on world food security, and since then has participated actively in the consideration of alternative texts. The voluntary undertaking that is before the conference contains a framework of objectives whose attainment would be a significant world achievement. Canada endorses the undertaking, and will, once suitable country coverage and implementation arrangements have been concluded, become a party to it. We must not blind ourselves, however, to the fact that much work remains to be done, particularly among the countries chiefly concerned, to make meaningful food security a reality. In this demanding and detailed task Canada will participate fully.

World food security in its broadest sense can only be attained by the prudent management of food supplies at every level -- a situation where governments, growers and traders in every country use their best judgment and foresight to assess probable needs and supplies. Canada has provided a key element in world food security in the past through its supply management and maintenance of stocks. This task is one we should be happy to share more widely. Improved information can play a big role, and we hope to see all the countries at this conference contribute extensively and accurately to the proposed Early Warning System. Food-importing countries have an evident self-interest in improving their storage capacity, which would augment world security. On a longer-term basis, security is most likely to come from providing producers and traders with stable expectations of a financial return commensurate with the value of their product -- a value which few people anywhere today would be inclined to question.

Two allied international fields of concern are inextricably bound up with the food problem -- international trade and the preservation of the environment. Canada has long supported a general liberalization of trade in food products, in order to encourage the efficient producer and thereby provide more abundant food at reasonable prices. This is one of our main objectives in the impending trade negotiations in Geneva. We recognize that certain food-importing countries face an enormous challenge in meeting their bills in the short and medium terms, and that this dilemma arises in some respects from factors beyond their control. This payments problem extends into every aspect of the economies of the countries concerned, however, and it is principally through general financial measures, including those taken within the IMF or IBRD, that Canada would expect to see this problem attacked. We are confident that the Geneva trade negotiations will follow the

directives of the Tokyo ministerial meeting of the GATT in September 1973 and secure additional benefits for the trade of developing countries, and Canada will strive to see this accomplished within a non-discriminatory trading framework.

In the longer-term perspective, mankind has no choice but to arrange its feeding in harmony with a balanced use of all the earth's resources, or its civilization will go the way of those of Nineveh and Babylon -- which destroyed the soils that fed them. The World Population Conference at Bucharest marked the first, albeit halting, step towards using a full range of policies to control the pressures exerted on this planet's resources. Progress in this area must be accelerated. Already we are experiencing declines in catches of certain species of ocean fish, and the sea is not the only resource whose capacity might come to be tested in the foreseeable future.

World food production has maintained a precarious adequacy through notable research accomplishments and through the application of modern technology. To gain further ground, these efforts must be redoubled, but our perspective of the problem must also be widened so that entire "eco-systems" can be used to greatest advantage and a lasting equilibrium can be achieved. I have outlined in some detail the Canadian position on the various elements of the World Food Strategy that the Secretary-General has set before us. We recognize that this strategy, if it is to bear fruit, will require a re-ordering of priorities on all our parts. But we also recognize that it will require the mobilization of vastly greater resources for agriculture, both nationally and by the international community. We believe that the time to set this World Food Strategy on its right course is here and now, by this conference. As an earnest of Canada's commitment to the solution of the world food problem, I am pleased to announce that the Canadian Government has decided to allocate at once the sum of \$50 million of Canada's development assistance, to be used in ways that will make an effective impact on the present critical situation.

The primary aim of this conference, as we see it, is to produce at every level of society an awareness of the affront to the human conscience that hunger constitutes, wherever it exists, and a determination to make its elimination a basic policy goal of all governments represented here. If that is to be the result of our conference, its conclusions cannot be allowed to implement themselves. We must try to ensure that we have the mechanisms that will enable us to monitor and review the progress that is being made, to correct the strategy when and where it needs correcting, and to see to it that existing and new resources are used to promote agri-

cultural development in a coherent and effective manner. It is our view that, in this essential process of pursuit, full advantage should be taken of the experience and the established competence of the organizations that have a contribution to make to the solution of the world food problem. This is not to say that all should remain as it is but that we should approach the matter of institutional arrangements with economy and good sense. On October 30, the Prime Minister of Canada met in Ottawa with the premiers of the ten Canadian provinces to discuss the problem of inflation. My Prime Minister took this opportunity to raise with his colleagues from the provinces the world food problem. They told him that they were also preoccupied by it and that provincial governments were prepared to co-operate with the Government of Canada in contributions to the resolution of the world food problem. I think this vividly reflects the seriousness with which the Canadian people view the problems before this conference. Future generations have a claim on our intelligence and our compassion, as do today's and, if we do our work well, they may come to look back on this conference as the starting-point for the development of a global process that gave each man, in truth, his daily bread.

S/C