

A World Food Action Program

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We have been waging a battle to improve the quality of life in the developing world for twenty-five years. Today this battle is being lost. As the world's military powers seek to reduce the risks of nuclear holocaust, new dangers to political and economic stability have arisen.

The threat of widespread famine is on the increase. Fertilizer shortages grow, and the affluent continue to consume a disproportionate amount of the world's food resources. Worldwide inflation continues to take a heavy toll on the developing and the developed countries alike. This erodes political stability and depletes what little hard currency the poor nations have amassed.

The rich and poor nations are in danger of entering a new era of confrontation fueled by economic desperation. All realize that they are vulnerable to economic blackmail. This situation is causing a breakdown of the traditional rules of the game governing access to supplies and raw materials. We are today at a crossroads of history comparable to the years following the end of the Second World War.

Today, as before, our nation faces a crisis of maintaining our growth in relative affluence while others face a crisis of sheer survival. Today, as before, we must fashion an adequate response to the plight of a great mass of people—over one billion people in more than thirty countries, who are the worst victims of the doubling and trebling of world food, fuel and fertilizer prices. These most severely affected countries might be described as a new Fourth World. The bill the developing countries as a whole must pay in increased petroleum prices is an estimated \$10 billion. Food and fertilizer price rises are expected to add an additional \$5 billion.

HUBERT H. HUMPHREY, U.S. Senator from Minnesota, recently addressed the Rensselaer Meeting on the World Food and Energy Crisis at the United Nations. This article has been adapted from his May 9 address.

Today, as before, the American response to these global problems must draw upon what is best in our people. We must recognize the interdependence of our security with the well-being of all. The progress of Americans can flow from the progress of others, as it has with the impressive postwar improvement in Europe. If, on the other hand, the opportunity for economic progress is denied one-fourth of the human race, no institutional structure, no concept of world order, no "structure of peace" can long survive.

President Nixon has recently submitted an expanded foreign assistance program. At the recent U.N. General Assembly on raw materials and development, Secretary Kissinger announced our intention to provide emergency assistance, in a cooperative framework, to the stricken Fourth World. Most recently, we offered an emergency proposal at the U.N. urging the creation of a \$4 billion special fund to which the U.S. would contribute its "fair share." This fund would supply additional assistance to the most severely affected to enable them to buy fuel, fertilizer and other essential commodities. Though well-intentioned, American efforts thus far lack specific financial commitments which the Fourth World expects and needs.



I intend to discuss a specific proposal—a proposal which I believe could prevent chaos and suffering. It will allow our nation to fulfill its humanitarian obligation to the world community. It will respond to an urgent request of the recent U.N. session for "an emergency relief operation to provide timely relief to the most seriously affected developing countries." It is not a program of charity, for charity is not the way to develop

human potential and foster a viable world order. It is, rather, a program designed to lead the world back from the precipice of famine. It will afford millions with the opportunity to go beyond mere survival and develop the potential of their economies and their lives. It is also a program which recognizes the urgent need to develop new standards and institutions to ensure access to supplies of essential commodities to all nations, rich and poor.

I propose a World Food Action Program that involves important initiatives for the United States on four broad fronts: expanded food aid, a program of food reserves, an improved system of fertilizer distribution and production, and an increased emphasis on agricultural development.

The United States is blessed with great industrial and military power. But this power shrinks in magnitude compared to the power of food. We are the world's breadbasket. Our natural tendency to produce food in abundance gives us today enormous power over the lives and fortunes of a majority of the world's people. Used wisely, America's food power can be a force for enlightened and compassionate ends. Used only for narrow, short-term advantage, it becomes a precious resource squandered in the face of great human suffering. I believe our contribution to the growing economic crisis in the Fourth World should be primarily in the form of food and the means and technology to produce it. The food action plan I propose will, I hope, serve as a model for initiatives by other nations that can afford to be generous at a moment of growing need.

Twenty-five years ago Europe was threatened with economic and political disintegration. The United States responded strongly and generously. The Marshall Plan can again serve as an example of effective assistance to those in distress. Today, when the lives and well-being of hundreds of millions in Africa, Asia and Latin America are at stake, we can do no less. We cannot wait for the World Food Conference in November. Time is running out for millions.



First of the four points is that food aid must be expanded. At a time when world needs have reached crisis proportions, our food aid shipments have been slashed severely. A significant part of what is available goes for security-related programs in Southeast Asia.

All nations must take immediate steps to expand their food production. But this is not enough. The food surplus nations must also set aside a portion of their increasingly profitable food exports for transfer to the poorest nations, and the transfer must be

on terms poor nations can afford, for the present world food prices are simply beyond the financial means of the poorest nations. Specifically, I propose a three-year emergency food aid effort. It would be aimed at the nations hardest hit by food and energy price rises and fertilizer shortages and would include the following steps: The United States will offer the sale of at least \$1 billion worth of food annually at today's market price. Countries purchasing this food will pay the going market price of July 1, 1972, commercial terms. The difference between today's higher prices and the July 1, 1972, price would be in the form of long-term concessional credits.

This American proposal should be conditioned upon a comparable offer from other nations with a major food surplus—notably the Canadians and Australians. Their fair share of the total aid effort would be proportionate to their share of world grain exports in recent years—about 70 per cent from the U.S., 20 per cent from Canada, and 10 per cent from Australia. I also believe this new program of expanded food aid should be matched immediately by reciprocal assistance measures on the part of the oil exporting nations. Recent oil price increases and energy shortages have already begun to decrease world food production. Therefore, a decline in oil prices will help spur world food production.

For the very poorest nations and those already suffering famine, we should expand our PL 480 Food for Peace sales program on terms softer than the proposal I have just made. The PL 480 food grants for the nutritionally vulnerable and for food-for-work programs have also been cut dramatically. Approximately twenty million people have been removed from these important programs. We must move to expand this grant food aid program. Our much diminished PL 480 program must be restored at least to the 1972 commodity level.

The United States is also a major contributor to the international World Food Program under the direction of the United Nations. This program carries out vital emergency relief and nutrition activities. Sharp food price increases have reduced the availability of food for this international effort. Many worthwhile new projects have been abandoned. The United States, which has presently pledged to provide \$140 million in food and cash in 1975-76, must increase its pledge to at least \$200 million. We must encourage other nations to increase their contributions so that the commodity level can be restored to the 1972 level. Again, this should be looked upon as only a minimum effort to deal with an emergency.

People must understand that the severe world food crisis will not miraculously disappear even if we have the bumper harvests anticipated for this year. Last year we had record crops. Despite this fact, world food reserves are today dangerously low. They are approaching a level of supply which could last only three weeks.

Second, we must establish a food reserve program. We have a moral obligation to establish a buffer against the threat of mass starvation. We simply cannot rely on ideal weather and no major crop diseases to assure a safe supply of food. The world's leading food producer and exporter, the United States, has no national food reserve policy. We blithely assume all will work out for the best.

Grain reserves provide an important measure of stability in the world food economy. They also ensure the capability of the international community to respond when droughts or crop failures occur. It is essential, then, that the U.S. Congress act quickly to pass the legislation I have proposed establishing a national food reserve policy.

Closely related to a reserve policy is the need to assure fair prices to farmers for their products. A fair price is the incentive for production. The existence of sizable reserve stocks must not be used to deny farmers a reasonable return on their investments and efforts.

The international community must also establish a new global food reserve system. FAO Director-General Boerma's plan for the international coordination of national food reserve policies must be given concrete form at the World Conference, and then implemented without delay.

Third, world fertilizer production must be expanded. The global shortage of chemical fertilizers has already had disastrous consequences in the developing world. This is especially true in South Asia. Not only have prices soared, but many poor countries have been unable to purchase required amounts at any price. Japan, the United States and European nations have reduced their fertilizer exports because of their domestic needs. Every dollar's worth of fertilizer now denied a country such as India may well force it to import five dollar's worth of food next winter. This is an economic loss that these nations and the world can ill afford.

The United States and other fertilizer exporting nations must take steps to ensure that critical fertilizer needs in the developing countries are met without endangering domestic agricultural production. We must restore our fertilizer exports to reasonable levels, both through commercial channels and our aid program. This will require expansion of fertilizer production facilities. If necessary to insure this expansion, the Government should stand ready to offer credits and tax incentives. More fertilizer needs to be sent to developing countries this summer and fall. The industrial countries need to consult urgently on the means for doing so. We must ask the American people to reduce the noncritical and nonfarm uses of fertilizer which now total nearly three million tons of nutrient—well above the anticipated fertilizer deficit in Asia this year.

A major cooperative effort is needed to increase production in existing nitrogen fertilizer plants in poor countries. Many are now producing at below two-thirds their capacity. Additional technical assistance and spare parts will be necessary from the United States and other industrialized nations. It is now clear that the comparative advantage in nitrogen fertilizer production lies with those nations with abundant energy supplies. The United States and other industrial nations should assure the oil exporting nations—which are blessed with natural gas, the feedstock of nitrogen fertilizer—that we will share with them our technologies to open new supplies of fertilizer. The World Bank could take the lead in coordinating this effort. The battle against global hunger cannot be won without abundant supplies of fertilizer at reasonable costs.



Fourth, agricultural production in the food deficit nations must be increased. The developing countries constitute the world's greatest reservoir of untapped food production potential. Vast increases in food production are possible in these nations. These increases can be achieved at a far lower cost in the use of energy and fertilizer than in the agriculturally advanced nations. The realization of this potential is crucial if the world's food supply is to grow rapidly enough to meet the needs of population growth and rising affluence.

Special emphasis needs to be placed on effectively involving the world's small farmers in the effort. A generation of experience has taught us the benefit of intensively cultivated small farms. They more than hold their own in comparison with the output of large farms. They also supply jobs for the growing legions of the unemployed in the developing world. This approach to rural development contributes greatly to the motivation of smaller families that is the prerequisite of a major reduction in birth rates. Agricultural development will not come easily. It will require supplying farmers with education, credit, extension services, fertilizers, improved seeds, appropriate machinery and water supplies. It will require expanded multilateral and bilateral economic assistance programs. It will require expanded world research efforts to discover even more productive seed varieties.

It is imperative that the Congress act quickly to approve the U.S. replenishment of funds for the International Development Association. The World Bank, under the leadership of Robert McNamara, is increasingly focusing its efforts on this area of greatest need—rural and small farm development.

Special attention in the developing countries must

be given to the problems of food spoilage and waste. Poor storage, inefficient marketing practices and inadequate facilities result in massive losses of food and fiber. A special effort, perhaps led by the FAO, to reduce global food losses is vital. At the same time, we cannot ignore the different but very real form of waste occurring in the more affluent nations. Each day enough uneaten food is scraped from plates in restaurants and homes to sustain millions.

The Food Action Program I have outlined would begin to meet the urgent need for immediate international cooperation to avert famine. It would do much more. It could establish new standards by which nations deal with global resource scarcities. Many of the fundamental questions raised by these shortages are present also in the case of food. We should use American food to set a new standard for international economic conduct. We have too much at stake to miss the opportunity to see that there are rules guaranteeing access to supplies and markets for all countries. One of the most important components of the food action program I have outlined—expanded food aid—could be implemented in a matter of weeks. The legislation giving the President the authority to act already exists in our PL 480 legislation. Although Congressional approval is not necessary, Congressional consultation is imperative.



I have introduced, together with my colleagues, a World Food Action Resolution. This resolution will urge the President to take immediate action in expanding our food assistance to meet the growing crisis of human suffering in the developing world.

Some have suggested that the American people will not support an expanded food aid program. I do not believe this has to be the case. The American people have always responded generously in times of crisis. We at least need to ask them. We cannot afford to reach such a conclusion without an inform-

ed national dialogue. The American public has only recently begun to hear of the world food crisis.

One frequent objection to increased government food aid is that domestic prices will tend to be pushed higher. I do not believe this to be the case. We can provide expanded food assistance in the manner I have suggested—without price increases. This can be accomplished by limiting our sales on the commercial market. We must reserve part of our supplies for sales to the poorest countries threatened by famine on cash and credit terms they can afford to pay. This food program—to save lives and create an environment conducive to peace—will cost less than three Trident submarines.

In the final analysis, a fundamental moral choice cannot be evaded. Can a nation whose nutritionists proclaim obesity to be a leading health problem share its bountiful food resources with those whose very survival is at stake? When our own lifestyles affect the basic well-being of others, can we avoid making the necessary minor adjustments? A decision by Americans to eat one less hamburger a week would make some ten million tons of grain available for food assistance.

It is also in the self-interest of the United States to take the lead in developing this program. Starvation and hunger are the breeding grounds for political instability and economic chaos. Americans do have a stake and a vital interest in social progress. As Pope Paul said: "Development is the new name for peace." The countries we would be helping provide vitally needed resources for all nations—particularly the industrialized and more affluent nations.

While I urge my country to take the lead in this effort, I would expect others to follow. The United Nations has already set the stage for a cooperative effort in meeting the crisis of the Fourth World. If the nations of the world confront the global food crisis head on, we will be taking a step toward saving millions of lives in peril. By undertaking this food action program, the human community will be reaffirming its ability to cope with crisis. If we do not take the initiative now and begin to define our future, we should not be surprised when tragic events define it for us.