

The Right to Food

A Statement of Policy

There is something new under the sun. For many years it has been asserted that there is no domestic constituency for foreign aid, the alleviation of world hunger, or global development. "The only letter I ever got from a constituent on the subject," says one prominent senator, "complained that we were squandering America's wealth on the commies." In mid-1974 Bread for the World was formed as a citizen's lobby on world hunger and development. It has grown with remarkable rapidity, and now aims at having an active lobbying group in every Congressional district. For reasons both strategic and substantive BFW formed itself as a Christian citizens' lobby, aiming to unleash the vast untapped resources of mainstream (mostly nonactivist) church membership.

But what does Bread for the World stand for in terms of specific policy changes? This question has been asked repeatedly, and in response to it BFW's Board of Directors has drawn up the following statement, "The Right to Food." We think it a statement worthy of serious consideration. It may well have a strong impact in shaping citizen and voluntary group action in the years ahead. BFW emphasizes this is a provisional statement, open to discussion and further revision. If you have ideas on how it might be redirected or otherwise strengthened, you are invited to write Bread for the World (235 East 49th Street, New York, N.Y. 10017). If you wish to share your views with other readers of Worldview, we will be keeping the correspondence columns open. —Eds.

Our response to the hunger crisis springs from God's love for all people. By creating us and redeeming us through Jesus Christ, he has given us a love that will not turn aside from those who lack daily bread. Our own human wholeness no less than theirs is at stake.

As Christians we affirm the right to food: the right of every man, woman, and child on earth to a nutritionally adequate diet. This right is grounded in the value God places on human life and in the belief that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." Because other considerations flow from these, we cannot rest until the fruit of God's earth is shared in a way that befits his human family.

Today hundreds of millions suffer from acute hunger. Emergency food aid is imperative. For this reason Bread for the World supports the work of church and other agencies in alleviating hunger, and urges increased support for them. However, the problem is far too massive for private agencies alone. The resources that governments command must also be used if food is to reach people in most areas of famine.

But emergency aid is not enough. We need to think in terms of *long-range strategies* that deal with the *causes* of hunger. These causes include poverty, illiteracy, lack of health services, technical inadequacy, rapid growth of population, and unemployment, to

name some of the more serious. Church relief agencies have increasingly sponsored development projects that address these problems. But again, although there are small models of excellence on the part of those agencies, the extent of hunger makes large-scale government assistance essential.

Hunger is also rooted in privileges that may, in securing wealth for some, perpetuate the poverty of others. Because they reflect sinful human nature and are usually sanctioned by custom and law, these privileges are often the most obstinate causes of hunger. The rich can resist taxes that could generate jobs for the poor. Landless peasants may be forced to work for a few pennies an hour. Tenant farmers are often kept in perpetual debt. The powerful, with privileges to protect, can use repression to prevent change.

The problem of privileges for some at the cost of hunger for others applies not only to persons and groups within a country but also to nations. Because the United States earns more than twice the income of the entire poor world, U.S. Christians need to be especially alert to the possibility that our privileges may come at high cost to others.

The policies of the U.S. Government are especially crucial regarding world hunger. Our nation can lead countless persons out of hunger or lock them into

despair and death. Citizen impact on U.S. policies is, therefore, our most important tool in the struggle against hunger.

In affirming the right to food, Bread for the World seeks:

- I. *An end to hunger in the United States.* It supports:
 - A. A floor of economic decency under every U.S. citizen through measures such as a minimum income and guaranteed employment
 - B. Steps to improve existing programs, such as (1) food stamps; (2) school lunches; and (3) nutritional assistance for especially vulnerable persons, along with steps to enroll in these programs all who qualify
 - C. A national nutrition policy that enables every citizen to get an acceptably nutritious diet

II. *A U.S. food policy committed to world food security and rural development, as proposed by the World Food Conference.*

The United States clearly shoulders a special responsibility regarding global food needs. Our country controls most of the world's grain exports. U.S. commercial farm export earnings from poor countries alone jumped from \$1.6 billion in 1972 to \$6.6 billion in 1974—an increase double the amount of our entire development assistance to those countries. While this happened U.S. food assistance declined sharply. We now need to respond in a way that reflects the more generous U.S. tradition of two decades following World War II.

The World Food Conference charted the necessary path to world food security under a World Food Council that would coordinate both emergency relief efforts and long-range rural development. Bread for the World supports:

- A. U.S. participation in a world food reserve program, with reserves under national control
- B. An increase in U.S. food assistance, especially the grant portion, to at least the level of a tithe (10 per cent) of this country's food exports, as our share toward the establishment of a grain reserve with an initial world target of 10 million tons
- C. A substantial increase in the amount of food made available to the U.S. World Food Program and to voluntary agencies for distribution abroad
- D. Humanitarian, not political, use of food assistance, with assistance channeled through, or in cooperation with, international agencies
- E. A fair return to the U.S. farmer for his production, with curbs against windfall profits and special measures to assist family farmers
- F. Full U.S. participation in the International Fund for Agricultural Development, along with other steps that would promote rural development in the poor countries and, among other things, assure them adequate supplies of fertilizer and energy, and accelerate research relating to food production there

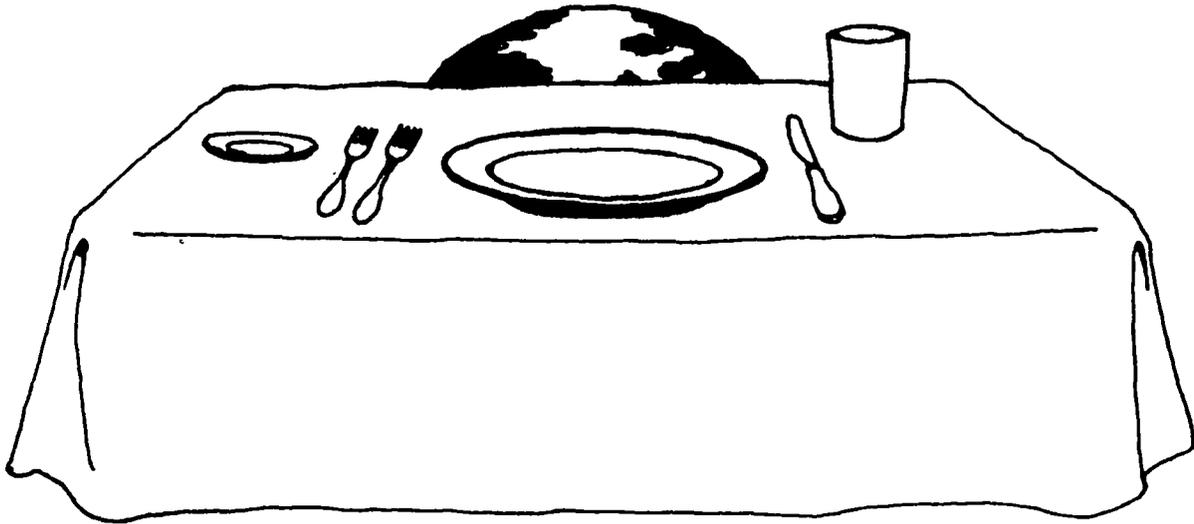
III. *The reform and expansion of U.S. development assistance.*

The United States currently ranks near the bottom of Development Assistance Committee nations when assistance is measured as a percentage of GNP. By official (and somewhat exaggerated) figures U.S. development assistance to poor countries amounts to one-fourth of 1 per cent of our GNP. We can do better than that. What is true for the United States is true for all countries: "To whom much has been given, of him will much be required." Further, the *quality* of assistance is crucial. Assistance should deliver self-help opportunities primarily to those living in hunger and poverty, especially the rural poor. It should be aimed at developing self-reliance, not dependency on the part of the recipient nations. And rather than imposing capital-intensive Western technologies on those countries, assistance should make possible the development of locally appropriate technologies, usually geared to small-scale, labor-intensive methods. Bread for the World therefore supports:

- A. A U.S. contribution, in proportion to our share of the world's income, to the International Fund for Agricultural Development as a major attempt to increase the food production capacity and living standards of impoverished rural families
- B. Rapid movement toward the 1-per-cent-of-GNP assistance goal
- C. The "untying" of assistance. Economic strings that put burdens on recipient nations should be cut.
- D. Honest accounting of U.S. assistance. Loans are counted as grants-in-aid figures. Either repayments from previous aid loans should be subtracted or only a percentage of the loans counted, because they are made on below-market terms.
- E. Channeling of development assistance through international and transnational agencies, where possible, without precluding the expansion of bilateral assistance
- F. Adoption, with other donor and recipient nations, of an internationally agreed set of standards on the basis of which the amount of development assistance would be determined. These standards should include (1) need; (2) evidence that development is occurring among the masses of poor people; (3) willingness of leaders to institute basic reforms, such as land reform, tax reform, and anticorruption measures, in order to reduce the disparity between rich and poor within a country; (4) de-emphasis on military spending; and (5) efforts to secure human rights.

IV. *The separation of development assistance from all forms of military assistance.*

Most U.S. aid is either military assistance or assistance in which U.S. political and military considerations are uppermost. This mixing of humanitarian assistance with military and political aid gives the public an exaggerated impression of real U.S. aid to hungry



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and poverty-ridden countries. Bread for the World therefore proposes legislation to sever completely the connection between humanitarian development assistance and military and political assistance.

V. Trade preferences for the poorest countries.

Trade is not perceived by the public as a "hunger" issue, but trade, even more than aid, vitally affects hungry people. In the past poor countries have been compelled to export their raw materials at bargain prices and import high-priced manufactured products. The terms of such trade have progressively deteriorated over the past two decades. Recent food, fertilizer, and oil price hikes have left the forty poorest countries, representing a billion people, in a desperate position. For them in particular trade opportunities are more important than ever. Bread for the World therefore supports the following positions, which are partly embodied in the Trade Act of 1974:

- A. The lowering of trade barriers such as tariffs and quotas, especially on semi-processed and finished products. It has been estimated that these barriers cost U.S. consumers \$10 to \$15 billion a year.
- B. Special trade preferences for the poorest countries. These countries need markets for their products if they are to work their way out of hunger.
- C. Greatly increased planning for economic adjustment, including assistance for adversely affected U.S. workers and industries. Without this, U.S. laborers are made to bear an unfair burden and are increasingly pitted against hungry people.

VI. Reduced military spending.

U.S. Defense spending alone exceeds the total annual income of the poorest billion people on earth, the truly hungry children of God. Our thinking begins with them. During his Presidential years Dwight D. Eisenhower said: "Every gun that is made, every war-

ship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed." Bread for the World supports:

- A. Greater U.S. initiative in pressing for arms limitation agreements and mutual cutbacks in existing arms as well as greater public access to information surrounding negotiations
- B. Curtailment of the sale of arms, if possible by international agreement
- C. Adoption of a U.S. defense budget that would reduce military spending. For example, a 10 per cent reduction could provide \$9 billion for financing long-range measures against hunger.

VII. Study and appropriate control of multinational corporations, with particular attention to agribusiness.

Multinationals are playing an increasingly influential global role. They transcend national boundaries and often bring jobs and needed development opportunities to poor countries. But they create empires that are not accountable to host countries and often impose a type of development that reinforces inequalities and, consequently, the problem of hunger as well. Bread for the World therefore supports:

- A. The principle that each country has the right to determine its own path to human and social development, including legitimate control over outside investments
- B. Efforts to study and analyze the role of multinational corporations, especially as they relate positively or negatively to the problem of hunger
- C. National and international measures that seek fair means of accountability on the part of such companies
- D. Special examination of the role of corporate farming, with a view toward adequate safeguards

for low-income consumers and small family farm holders

VIII. Efforts to deal with the population growth rate.

Rapid population growth is putting great pressure on the world's food supply and on the capacity of countries to absorb the increase into their economies. Population growth will not be effectively curbed if it is dealt with in isolation, but only if placed in the context of total development needs. For example, hungry people usually have large families, in part because surviving sons provide security in old age. Only where social and economic gains include the poor, and where the rate of infant mortality begins to approximate that of the affluent nations, do people feel secure enough to limit family size. Bread for the World therefore supports:

- A. Greatly expanded U.S. efforts to enable the poor of the world to work their way out of hunger and poverty
- B. Additional U.S. assistance for health programs abroad aimed at reducing infant mortality and increasing health security
- C. Additional support for research to develop family planning methods that are dependable, inexpensive, simple, and morally acceptable to all
- D. Efforts to modify our own consumption, which strains the carrying capacity of the earth no less than population increases

IX. Christian patterns of living.

The growing scarcity of several key resources—grain, fuel, and fertilizer in particular—that directly

affect the food supply has prompted many to reassess their habits of consumption. This country, with 6 per cent of the world's population, consumes one-third or more of the world's marketed resources. On the average each person in the United States buys about 4.5 times the amount of grain—most of it indirectly as meat and dairy products, along with alcohol and pet food—that persons in poor countries do. There is often no direct connection between our using less and others having more. Nevertheless there are important psychological, symbolic, and spiritual values in reexamining our patterns of consumption. Bread for the World invites Christians to:

- A. Remember that along with changes in habits of consumption we have to change government policies, without which lifestyle modifications do little more than give us a misleading sense of accomplishment
- B. Reconsider our personal spending and consuming, with a view toward living more simply and less materialistically
- C. Reconsider a way of life in which billions of dollars are spent annually to make us crave, and in turn spend countless additional billions on, products we do not need, and which in fact often harm us—all this while sisters and brothers perish for lack of bread

These things we seek because we affirm for others a right that we enjoy: the right to food. We seek to extend to all this God-given right in obedience to Christ, who has called us to follow him in loving our neighbor as ourselves.