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CRITICAL ECONOMIC SITUATION IN AFRICA

Letter dated 3 October 1985 from the Permanent Representative of
the Federal Republic of Germany to the United Nations addressed
to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the enclosed "Report by the Group of Experts on Aid to Africa appointed by the Bonn Economic Summit", issued at Bonn on 30 September 1985 after its adoption by the Summit participants at their meeting in New York on 25 September 1985.

I should be grateful if you would arrange for the report to be circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 30.

(Signed) LAUTENSCHLAGER

ANNEX

Report by the Group of Experts on Aid to Africa
appointed by the Bonn Economic Summit
(Bonn, 9 September 1985)

Preface

The May 1985 declaration of the Bonn Summit voiced the concern of our Governments over the critical economic situation in Africa and renewed their commitment to the provision of assistance for emergency relief, recovery and long-term development.

In July, at a meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) held in Addis Ababa, Heads of State and Government of African nations concluded that external factors and domestic policy shortcomings had brought most of their countries close to economic collapse. They set down priorities for action and committed their Governments to the gradual increase in the share of agriculture in national total public investment to between 20 to 25 percent by 1989.

Recent world economic developments have impaired the capacity of many African countries to build, and indeed in some cases to sustain, momentum. In certain parts of the continent destabilizing conflicts are disrupting and compromising progress. It is proposed that the Summit Countries and the European Community maintain and strengthen their efforts towards world economic recovery and collaborate with African nations on measures to ensure that they benefit fully from that recovery.

The magnitude of the challenge calls for a renewed and strengthened international partnership with Africa. The environmental degradation and food shortages must be checked and reversed. Decisive action is required on the part of African Governments and peoples, who have primary responsibility for their recovery and development; international action to supplement their

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efforts is essential. It is proposed that the Summit Countries and the European Community pursue and deepen consultations and collaboration with African nations leading to a true partnership in recovery and development.

The emergency in Africa has brought our peoples closer together. It has drawn large numbers of voluntary organizations and ordinary citizens into direct action. Their further involvement and the direct contacts they have developed with their counterparts in Africa should be stimulated. International co-operation must translate into people helping people. The objective is to meet a priority set by Africans: to promote self-reliant, self-sustaining development that will be durable and solid.

A. Introduction

The situation in sub-Saharan Africa

Over one hundred million people in sub-Saharan Africa suffer from hunger and malnutrition. Per capita food production has dropped by some 20 % over the last 20 years. While the population increased annually by 3 %, food production merely increased by 1.2 % a year. Grain imports already absorb approximately 20 % of the total foreign exchange earnings of sub-Saharan Africa.

The favourable macro-economic conditions observed in the early 1970s dramatically deteriorated in the early 1980s. The previously stagnant per capita income has declined by 2 to 3 % per annum, the current account situation is worsening, and debt servicing already consumes approximately one quarter¹ of current export proceeds. This has further reduced the flexibility of

1 excluding Nigeria

already vulnerable African States to respond to the additional burden of successive years of drought and production failures.

The present crisis is characterized not only by general shortages of food in the worst affected countries but also by the inability of the rural populations in arid and semi-arid zones to survive successive years of drought, which triggered environmental and social collapse for hundreds of thousands who were already living at the economic margin.

The main causes of the crises are:

- the destruction of the eco-system by persistent drought and environmental degradation;
- inappropriate macro-economic and sectoral policies such as insufficient incentives for the agricultural and livestock sector, including inadequate marketing and pricing arrangements;
- lack of means of transportation;
- inadequate attention to improving and disseminating agricultural technology for Africa's key crops;
- population growth generally in excess of 3 %;
- unfavourable economic conditions which have included not only deteriorating terms of trade and declining commodity prices but also a growing debt burden together with liquidity shortfalls and budget constraints;
- armed conflicts.

Although the economic problems facing sub-Saharan developing countries are likely to persist in coming years, we are confident that there is a chance of

mastering the situation if sound policies on the part of African Governments go hand in hand with increased support by the whole international community comprising all countries in a position to contribute to this effort.

The last Summit Conference of OAU in Addis Ababa in July 1985 has demonstrated that African States are aware of the critical nature of the crisis and of approaches needed to tackle it. Courageous efforts have already been undertaken by certain African countries concerned. We must commend the difficult - indeed painful - adjustment processes many African States have undertaken to bring their internal and external accounts into closer balance.

II

Action required

1. The first priority must continue to be short-term emergency aid of all kinds, reaching those who are most vulnerable and most affected. This demands continued efforts by African States and by the international community well into 1986, both in supplying and in distributing the means of life to all drought and famine victims.
2. A vital role has already been played in co-ordinating international aid to reinforce African efforts by the international agencies, and especially by the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa set up by the United Nations Secretary General and by the World Food Programme (WFP). The Summit Countries and the European Community will continue strongly to support this work.
3. The next phase, which has fortunately already arrived in some of the affected countries, is the recovery phase of those populations affected, so that they can resume a productive and self-reliant life.
4. But it is necessary for African Governments to look beyond immediate needs to the more fundamental problems that have made this crisis so severe. The longer-term climatic and demographic trends plainly show that the risks of recurrence are increasing. It is urgent to foresee

these problems now and to help African countries do what is possible to confront them.

5. The Summit Countries and the European Community believe that it will be essential for themselves and other donor countries and institutions to reinforce the actions that have already been taken, preferably by participating with each affected country in an examination of the experience gained from the present crisis but also by concentrating on the following main fields in which specific follow-up action seems required.
6. First, there should be much better arrangements for monitoring crops and for access to food by vulnerable groups. This will require collaboration with African countries and international organizations to improve early warning systems and distribution of emergency food supplies.
7. It also implies assistance to African Governments to improve transport systems, whose weakness has impeded food distribution, as well as to improve national and regional preparedness plans.
8. Increased agricultural and food production lies at the heart of the problem, and in this context we should respond to the important decisions now taken by the OAU Summit at Addis Ababa to raise the volume of their domestic resources going to agriculture. Emphasis therefore should be placed on the formulation and implementation of agriculture and food policies which would give priority to smallholder farmers, particularly women, who produce the vast majority of subsistence food crops. This also implies much improved institutions for extension, marketing and research, including encouragement for the non-governmental and private sector.
9. It is essential to the realization of a "Green Revolution in Africa" to improve international assistance towards long-term agricultural research and make such research more relevant to the needs of the small producer, with particular emphasis on measures, including reafforestation,

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to prevent further environmental degradation.

10. Human resource development is an indispensable condition for any rural development programme in Africa. Moreover the impact of population growth and rapid urbanisation on environmental protection, food security and economic development prospects also need to be taken into account.

B. Recommendations for follow-up measures by the Summit Countries

The following individual measures are proposed for the priorities specified above:

1. Improvement of crop monitoring and early warning systems

- 1.1 The improvement of early warning systems cannot be disassociated from the wider task of restoring or building-up the national capacity to collect, interpret and disseminate meteorological information and monitor crop evolution, data on food stock situations and other relevant social and economic indicators of food crises.

The Summit Countries and the European Community recognize that without successful development of national and regional capacities in Africa itself no adequate overall early warning system is possible.

Although emphasis must necessarily be placed on the revival and/or reinforcement of national agro-meteorological services, regional organizations such as Centre Régional de la Télédétection Ouagadougou (CRTO), Regional Remote Sensing Facility (RRSF) in Nairobi or Centre Agro-météorologique et Hydrologique (Agrhymet) in Niamey have an important role to play to improve knowledge on natural resources and its utilization by the farming populations.

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As a complement to national and regional efforts, the Food and Agricultural Organization has operated an early warning system on the basis of on-the-spot information collected in member states and of remote sensing data. This FAO system plays a valuable role in many respects and has drawn attention to the drought and emerging famine in Africa.

1.2 It is proposed that Summit Countries and the European Community support the efforts for improving existing crop monitoring and early warning systems

- by ensuring that primary attention is focused on developing and/or restoring the basic agricultural data systems within Africa itself. This effort will include attention to the national agricultural systems themselves as well as support of regional efforts such as those encompassed in the Sahel and the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) regional food security programmes;
- by helping to establish or reinforce agro-meteorological and crop reporting services at the country level. This will include contributing to the improvement and support for the functioning of these services through institution building, training, development of agro-meteorological stations and access to remote sensing facilities;
- by making regional organizations such as CRTO, RRSF and Agrhymet more effective, and by improving the co-ordination and collaboration between these organizations and the FAO early warning system;
- by helping to standardize the physical, social and environmental criteria for the early detection of food shortages, including shortages in particular regions of individually affected countries;

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- by encouraging FAO in the improvement of its early warning system;
- by increasing the basic and advanced training facilities available in this sphere. In this context the September 1986 Berlin Conference on user assistance and training should be encouraged to give priority to the requirements of African countries;
- by recommending that the panel on remote sensing established as a result of the Versailles Summit be charged to formulate technical guidelines on the use of remote sensing with particular attention to African countries, also taking into account in their meetings the financial and management constraints affecting various African countries to enhance early warning capacities regarding drought conditions in sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Assistance to African Governments to improve transport and national and regional preparedness plans

- 2.1 There is a need to build on and enhance existing efforts to set up and implement national preparedness plans spelling out the various phases of crisis monitoring and management and associated administrative arrangements to be taken to make best use of local resources, calling on neighbouring countries and integrating external donor support with domestic action.

Owing to the overburdening of numerous African ports, inadequate storage facilities, bottlenecks in railway or road systems and administrative problems in the recipient countries, the assistance supplied either fails to reach many of the needy or reaches them too late. Bottlenecks have sometimes been exacerbated by the inappropriate phasing of relief supplies. Compounding the difficulty of effective relief distribution has been past neglect of investment in the

management of, and improved policies for, basic transport infrastructure including ports, related storage, and especially continued neglect of road and railway systems.

Co-ordinated efforts to date and the role of the WFP Africa Emergency Task Force have helped to ease logistical bottlenecks. However further and even more closely co-ordinated action is required to tackle underlying constraints.

2.2 It is therefore proposed that the Summit Countries and the European Community

- help to improve national systems for emergency monitoring and relief, including food security arrangements, by providing, as appropriate, assistance for contingency planning, stock management, and food stocks in the framework of existing storage capacities by African countries concerned to supplement local crop production;
- contribute to the reconstitution of such stocks when emergency requirements are foreseen;
- provide logistic means necessary to efficiently transport the aid: supply of lorries, spare parts and maintenance workshops which should function beyond the short period of emergency; make available air transport capacity particularly for remote areas in the absence of appropriate road and/or rail capacity;
- support African countries, within the scope of existing bilateral security co-operation, in the deployment of their military logistical means to participate in food distribution, as well as making available - where possible and cost-effectively - material and human resources of the armed forces of the Summit Countries;

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- co-ordinate even more closely their supplies of food aid, with due regard for the port, storage and distribution facilities available in the recipient countries, and in this connection advocate an even stronger co-ordinating role for WFP, including its computerized World Food Programme Information System for Africa (WISA);
- request, jointly and in collaboration with WFP, the Governments of recipient countries to remove any administrative bottlenecks, e.g. as regards import formalities;
- support the task force sent by WFP to help African Governments resolve logistical problems in the most heavily frequented and overburdened African ports;
- contribute to the protection of food and seed, including stores in ports, so as to prevent food supplies awaiting forwarding from being spoiled by adverse weather conditions;
- give attention to the long-term requirements for strengthening management and maintenance of transport systems through bilateral programmes on a regional and country-by-country basis. Attention needs to be paid not only to rehabilitation of systems degraded through long-term neglect and extra services to support emergency transport requirements, but also to broader management and recurrent cost issues to be addressed by improvements in tariff policies, rates and maintenance plans. The recent meeting on road maintenance convened by the World Bank in London is an important step in this direction. The railway systems require similar attention, as their important role in long-term economic development and possible future emergencies will be determined by timely investment before the onset of the crisis.

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3. Increased agricultural and food production

- 3.1 The present emergency, which requires the provision of subsistence food for famine victims, should not distract attention from the need to provide them with assistance for relaunching productive activities in the recovery phase.

Owing to a lack of foreign exchange, the sub-Saharan countries affected are not able to provide most of the requisite agricultural inputs, such as seed, fertilizers, pesticides and farm implements in order to rehabilitate their ailing agriculture rapidly and ensure the next harvest. The Summit Countries and the European Community are already making emergency contributions in this field within the scope of their bilateral co-operation.

But for longer-term famine prevention it is generally recognized that comprehensive food strategies are needed to ensure lasting improvements in food production, distribution etc. and hence food security. African Governments have acknowledged the need for greater priority to the agricultural sector, and their responsibility for designing and overseeing the implementation of comprehensive and appropriate food strategies, which take account of the need to improve incentives and services for producers and the efficiency of agricultural marketing systems (OAU Summit in 1984 and 1985, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) meeting in 1985).

A successful agricultural strategy would include particular attention to the needs of smallholder producers; especially women, and their complete access to the various institutional, legal and economic support services.

Improved agricultural and food production is given priority attention by the Summit Countries and the European Community, the World Bank and by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The European Community in co-operation with other bilateral and multilateral donors has, to start with, promoted food strategies in four African countries in the framework of a constant dialogue with

recipient countries and as part of its special programme to combat hunger in the world. The Lomé III Convention recognizes the need to intensify and generalize these efforts.

Losses of both crops and stocks from pests and diseases assume unacceptable proportions and contribute greatly to the overall food deficit. Of special significance are the "universal pests", particularly termites and those migratory pests which are of regional importance and recognize no national boundaries. While the Summit Countries and the European Community have well-developed expertise and institutions to assist with the attempted control of the latter (locusts, weaver birds, army worm, the greater grain borer etc.) the need for regional co-ordination and co-operation is essential if fully effective measures are to be implemented.

3.2 It is proposed that the Summit Countries and the European Community

- acting in co-operation with the World Bank Group, the African Development Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, maximize their bilateral co-operation funds for providing effective support to comprehensive and appropriate agricultural sector policies and food strategies designed by sub-Saharan countries particularly affected by drought;
- use their aid to support appropriate policy and structural changes introduced by African countries to improve production and marketing and especially to provide incentive prices and goods which will encourage small farmers (including women) and herders to produce for the growing urban markets, and where appropriate, for export;
- utilize remote sensing technology and improved crop reporting systems not only for the early warning system aforementioned but also for the establishment and monitoring of proper agricultural development plans including food strategies;

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- make available, within the framework of their aid programmes and in combination with their support to extension services, to farmers' and women's organizations, and to management in developing countries, increasing and continuing support for the development of the agricultural sector (including forestry, fisheries and livestock);
- invite the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the African Development Bank to become more actively involved so as to expand and complement the action already taken in regional pest control programmes, which should be more effectively co-ordinated.

4. Support for national and international agricultural research

- 4.1 Agricultural research provides a strategic basis for achieving a sharp increase in agricultural production in Africa, which could be called a "Green Revolution for Africa", as shown by the experiences of the Green Revolution in Asia and Latin America.

However, it is a cause for concern that agricultural research services in Africa are not providing adequate answers to farmers' problems. The shortcomings have included failure to develop appropriate new technology packages as well as failure to adequately develop effective linkages to disseminate existing technologies. Remedies are made more urgent by the drought.

These national research services need to be reconstituted and - where appropriate - linked closely to post-secondary educational institutions and to improved systems such as private and national extension services with the sustained support of the African Governments and the entire international donor community.

But national research services will not be able to carry out their essential functions - in terms of both basic and adaptive research - without closer collaboration from the wider international research efforts, including the 13 international research centres funded through

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the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), which have achieved their greatest success to date with the development of high-yielding types of wheat and rice. Research into major crops, livestock and other natural resources and farming systems suitable for arid and semi-arid regions deserves more focused support in view of the critical situation in sub-Saharan Africa. Use should be made of the potential of national research institutions and of regional institutions in Africa. Of complementary importance is the multiplication of the best seeds including indigenous varieties on a wide scale. Agricultural research supported by the Summit Countries and the European Community merits higher priority.

Particular action is needed to avoid duplication of efforts, to arrange effective dissemination of new technology, and to keep current the results of past and ongoing research, especially into particular crops in individual and ecologically similar zones.

In addition to the importance of research on the technical aspects of agricultural production, account must also be taken of research into food and food aid policy issues. The questions of the developmental as well as humanitarian use of food aid, its integration into national agricultural development policies, and its possible contribution to the alleviation of balance of payments burdens, in appropriate circumstances, merit ongoing consideration.

4.2 It is proposed that the Summit Countries and the European Community in the context of their development co-operation policies

- continue to support, in co-operation with the World Bank and other donors, the restoration and improvement of national research systems of African countries, on the basis set out above;
- encourage the World Bank to play a more active role in the effective co-ordination of donor support for national research work, taking into account the work of the CGIAR centers;

- support specific work into the growing and processing of major crops, trees and shrubs, pest control, and farming systems especially suited for arid and semi-arid areas and for the local communities living in those areas, including the testing of plant species in particular localities;
- promote multiplication of the best types of seeds, and support their dissemination via all possible channels of distribution be they public or private;
- encourage the CGIAR system and International Agricultural Research Centres (IARCS) to accelerate the redirection of their resources towards basic research needs in Africa and especially of the drier areas;
- support and further develop commodity networks which link national research and educational institutions with each other and with existing IARCS primarily for the commodities of cereals, especially for arid zones, pulses, root crops and forages;
- promote and improve effective donor co-ordination and African regional technical co-operation to strengthen the national research systems through various structures such as Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC), Comité Permanent inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel (CILSS) and the Club du Sahel. This should include the expansion and strengthening of third country technical co-operation wherever appropriate.

5. Desertification

- 5.1 Desertification is part of a long-term process of sustained environmental degradation which may be accelerated by drought but is caused primarily by overuse of land by humans and livestock, thus threatening the ecological balance in many previously productive areas.

There are no promising short-term or grandiose solutions to this complex process. Longer-term answers depend primarily on those who are the custodians and beneficiaries of the threatened land.

Past experience shows that communities themselves can be mobilized to combat desertification through locally based agroforestry at the farmstead, social forestry at the community level, and soil and water conservation. Serious medium and longer-term efforts must also be undertaken to help make population pressures more manageable, to develop the human resource base and to improve sector policies for rural and urban development.

5.2 In view of the complexity and gravity of the desertification process, it is proposed that the Summit Countries and the European Community should

- support, and help to co-ordinate closely, the efforts made to redress the problem at the initiative of the affected African countries;
- incorporate into all development programmes and projects, where possible, components to safeguard and improve the natural resource base;
- support socio-economic research to establish the best answers to questions such as land tenure, how to mobilize rural communities to activities related to combat desertification; and how to avoid disincentives created by prolonged food aid;
- support action to mobilize local communities and to allow them to tackle effectively at their level the problems of environmental protection including in particular by reafforestation. In this context work by local and overseas organizations is to be supported, including the mobilization of volunteers, such as international "green corps" movements, to carry out timely and cost-

effective assistance in co-operation with the relevant communities under the supervision of expert professionals;

- encourage and support the revision of formal educational curricula so that they better reflect the seriousness of the environmental problem, as part of African countries' own efforts to make education more relevant to life in their societies;
- support research on local and exotic tree species capable of providing fodder, fruit, especially for communities in the drier areas, and on fuelwood and development of alternative energy sources. Help should also be given to develop the capacities of forestry and related administrative services to deal with these problems;
- support the establishment of national networks between government, non-governmental and private agencies to exchange information on factors for combating desertification, act as clearing houses, and stimulate faster and wider action, adapted to the varied needs of different regions and communities;
- support regional initiatives aimed at understanding the factors affecting desert encroachment and spreading knowledge of successful approaches to slowing it. This should include support for disciplined, co-ordinated efforts, in particular from institutions like the Intertropical Network for Research on Resistance against Drought and from regional associations such as the CILSS, the SADCC and the East Africa Djibouti group, among others, as well as support for other activities in the field;
- support activities undertaken by relevant multilateral organizations such as the United Nations Environmental Programme and the Food and Agricultural Organization to assist national and regional activities to combat desertification.

The conference which will be organised by France in Paris at the beginning of 1986 will permit exchanges and discussions necessary for the intensification of the fight against desertification in Africa.

6. Final remarks

- 6.1 As many African Governments increasingly recognize, the inexorable rise in their populations, particularly in the urban areas, places an immense strain both on their ability to provide basic services like education and health, and on the fixed resources represented by their land (and especially their arable land). The severe impact of this present famine has been greatly aggravated by massive migratory movements and the high rate of growth in the population in relation to the rate of growth of food production in the worst affected countries since the previous widespread drought. But the standard projections show far greater rises on the way. Within the lifetime of many born today, the population of the seven worst affected countries will rise from 80 million to 358 million people.

Any action in this area can only be taken in support of strategies worked out by each African Government within its local socio-cultural environment. It seems, however, necessary to underline that the measures proposed in relation to agricultural development, food production and the degradation of the environment must be accompanied by actions of the African countries to address the issue of population growth. If requested to do so, the Summit Countries and the European Community are open to consider favourably requests for assistance in this crucial area and support organizations such as the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) as well as other agencies active in this field. Such action should follow the lines agreed by consensus at the International Conference on Population held in Mexico in 1984.