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Chairman: Sir Douglas COPLAND (Australia).

AGENDA ITEM 66

Establishment of a world food reserve (A/2710 and Corr.1 and 2, A/C.2/L.250) (*continued*)

1. Mr. NASH (United States of America) said that the Costa Rican Government was to be commended for drawing attention to the importance of the world food problem.

2. In its explanatory memorandum (A/2710 and Corr. 1 and 2) the Costa Rican Government stressed that the establishment of a world food reserve would help to alleviate emergency famine. In that respect he recalled that the matter of international action to assist countries faced with emergency famine had been considered on various occasions by the United Nations and the Food and Agriculture Organization. As a result of action taken at the sixth session of the FAO Conference in 1951, the Director-General, under resolution No. 15, had been given the responsibility of investigating the nature of any serious food shortage or famine which might threaten any member country, to report on any international assistance needed and, when an emergency arose requiring international relief measures, to convene a meeting of the FAO Council or of interested Governments to consider what action might be required.¹ In 1952 the Economic and Social Council, at its fourteenth session, had authorized the Secretary-General under resolution 425 (XIV) to co-ordinate the famine-relief activities of inter-governmental organizations, Governments and voluntary agencies and to secure their co-operation. A series of recommendations designed to assist States in dealing with the problem of hunger and famine had also been adopted by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and FAO. He therefore felt that the authority and responsibility which had been conferred upon the United Nations and FAO provided an adequate basis for vigorous action by those organizations in cases where international emergency action appeared necessary.

3. For two years the technical and financial aspects of establishing an international food reserve had been exhaustively analysed by FAO, which had decided that it was impracticable to constitute such a reserve; instead

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Report of the Sixth Session of the Conference, 19 November-6 December, 1951, Rome, 1952.*

it had recommended preparations by member countries for rapid *ad hoc* action to relieve emergency famine conditions. There was little to warrant the belief that a new examination of the idea, either alone or as part of a larger scheme, would lead to any substantially different conclusions.

4. The fact that he did not believe that special international stocks were required to meet disaster situations did not mean that the United States was insensitive to the needs of less fortunate countries. The readiness of the United States to help when it was able to do so had a history dating back to the great Russian famine of 1921. Again, in 1953, the United States had sent shipments of wheat to alleviate famine in Pakistan. The Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act authorized the President to use, over a three-year period, surplus agricultural commodities to provide relief to peoples in other lands. Under that Act, food had been offered in the summer of 1954 and was being made available to flood victims in Central and Eastern Europe.

5. Another function of a world food reserve, as stated in the Costa Rican memorandum, was the stabilization of world agricultural prices by the establishment of buffer stocks. The methods by which that purpose might best be achieved had been the subject of extensive consideration in almost all the economic bodies of the United Nations. As his delegation had stated at the seventeenth session of the Economic and Social Council (765th meeting), the United States was prepared to consult with other interested Governments on an *ad hoc* basis regarding the problems relating to individual primary commodities, but any international agreement which attempted to cover several commodities simultaneously would mean widespread interference in the workings of the world economy and would involve the serious risk of distorting production, consumption and trade patterns. The net results of such arrangements, even if it were practicable to conclude them, might well be detrimental to economic development.

6. Finally, it was suggested that a world food reserve might encourage production and consumption of and trade in agricultural commodities. Those were among the fundamental responsibilities of FAO, as clearly specified in its Constitution. It would be unnecessary duplication to establish a new international organization with responsibility for the same matters.

7. He fully agreed with the ultimate purposes of the Costa Rican proposal but, as the FAO representative had stressed, the experience and attitude of Governments had shown that little purpose could be served at the moment by merely submitting another general proposal for international action in the same connexion. The efforts of Members could therefore be more profitably directed towards making more effective use of existing machinery.

8. Mr. DEMCHENKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that a large part of the world's population, including many of the inhabitants of highly developed countries, was badly clothed and under-nourished. A high proportion suffered real hunger. In the Far East in particular the food situation was worse than it had been before the war.

9. In Latin America also a majority of the population was under-nourished and the rate of increase in food production was less than the rate of growth of the population. During the agricultural year 1952-1953 *per capita* food production in that region had been ten per cent less than before the war. Much potentially productive land was not cultivated and production in general was hampered by the primitive methods of agriculture, the shortage of agricultural machinery and the feudal or semi-feudal systems of land tenure that still prevailed in some countries. Vast tracts of fertile land were owned by foreign monopolies and were used to grow one or two special crops for export, while the local population went short of essential foodstuffs. Moreover, the countries of Latin America did not receive fair prices for the raw material exports on which their economies were far too dependent and as a result were unable to import enough additional food to provide the population with an adequate diet.

10. Many people were under-nourished in Europe too, and in many areas consumption of such important foodstuffs as meat, butter and eggs was lower than it had been before the war; in Italy in particular hundreds of

thousands of people never ate meat because they could not afford it.

11. In many countries, including the United States of America, the increase in the cost of living during 1952-1953, which was largely attributable to the armaments race, had been much greater than the increase in wages; the difference had been particularly marked in under-developed countries. The decline of real wages had forced workers to reduce their consumption and, as a result, the production of certain foodstuffs in some countries had exceeded the effective, although not the real demand.

12. The best way to improve the world food situation was to put an end to the armaments race and the discriminatory commercial policies followed by certain countries. The restoration of normal trade relations between all countries and the utilization of natural resources for peaceful purposes would provide the basis for increased consumption and production of foodstuffs throughout the world.

13. He was interested in the draft resolution proposed by the delegations of Costa Rica and of other countries (A/C.2/L.250), but regretted that he had not had time to study it adequately. He hoped that the text would not be put to the vote at the present meeting.

14. Mr. SAPRU (India) moved the adjournment of the meeting.

The motion to adjourn was adopted unanimously.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.