



## WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE

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ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF  
MEXICO, MR. LUIS ECHEVERRIA ALVAREZ, TO THE  
WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE, 11 NOVEMBER 1974

Mr. President of the Conference,

Gentlemen:

We are living through a decisive moment. This period is not limited simply by the tragic frontier between affluence and poverty. The destiny of mankind is at stake.

Today's realities, which are now the protagonists of history, reveal the urgent and imperative need to transform the present economic order. This assertion, which only a few years ago would have been considered an unacceptable exaggeration, has now become the only reasonable measured approach. Today, the worst demagogy is conformism and the falsification of reality. This demagogy, the true dialectical weapon of international lack of solidarity, is the ideological instrument of all those who refuse to accept the change that has taken place in the world.

I know my words are certain to be heard by an alert and clear-thinking audience. This meeting has had the courage to establish a firm balance on the future of a planet governed by irrational priorities and the fate of hundreds of millions of hungry, hopeless human beings.

To repeat certain data and decipher its significance may seem to many people who are tired of hearing words that are never backed up by action simply a prolongation of ambiguity and lack of precision. I have no intention of making new and useless demands here on the consumer societies. I simply wish to participate in the analysis of the causes that have led to the current crisis and in the alternatives and solutions for confronting it.

Beyond any doubt, we are witnessing a complex and continuous series of universal, social and economic upheavals in a world disjointed by the juxtaposition of rich and poor nations and by the contradiction between technological development and material underdevelopment.

The confluence of these two overpowering elements of reality demonstrates the failure not only of the consumer society, but also of present-day civilization, a civilization which manifests itself to modern man on three broad levels of his own sociological experience: technology, institutions, and ideology.

Technology, despite its brilliant entry into the Atomic Age and the Space Age, has perpetuated a primary exploitation project, that is, it has become simply a further extension of power politics as conceived and carried out in the age of Empire, of colonialism, and of the military and economic domination of the weak by the strong.

Traditional institutions and the body of laws and policies derived from power politics have still not been replaced by the renovating and dynamic institutions that might have permitted a qualitative change in international relations.

The ideology that accompanies, defends, and sustains those institutions is a further alienating factor, and acts as the moral armor or a system that makes technology an instrument of information, but not of change. Electronic computers tell us how many hundreds of millions of people go hungry and how many children will die of starvation this year. This cybernetic revelation has not led to any coherent action, nor has it established, within the strict confines of scientific knowledge, any real body of thought that provides a rational and humane alternative to these figures.

The consumer ideology that hardens man's conscience in this age of telecommunications results, almost as though it were a normal process, in a social conscience that completely disregards the moral and political dimensions of collective social problems. Thus, underdevelopment has been taken to indicate the socioeconomic failure of certain specific societies, but there has been no attempt to explore its real meaning, which is that underdevelopment is simply a peripheral aspect of development.

We are confronted, at one and the same time and within the same sphere of human activity, with a world famine belt and with societies that have an excess of goods, with the wastage of raw materials and with the prolongation and expansion of rearmament programs which are still based, in spite of the ostensible revolutionary science involved in the means they employ, on the strategic and moral criteria of the last century.

Ten months ago I stated here, at FAO that the problems the world faces are due to its increasing population, which will double in numbers within the next 35 years; to the existence of a universe of young people in the Third World --- 45% of its total population --- and to the fact that, in our time, it is impossible to continue the exploitation and human inequalities on the ideological and material basis of old and new empires.

The petroleum question and the rising prices of raw materials have shown that producer countries demand, obtain, and will continue to obtain their sovereign right to recuperate their own natural resources and to establish, on the world market, a legitimate economic defense mechanism as their response to an order built by force with many weapons of power politics, during the course of entire centuries of dependence.

A new and irreversible age of history has begun. It is marked by an important change in the correlation of international forces. Let no one be deceived in this respect. No state, no nation, no matter how powerful it may be, can change or alter this universal movement toward the liberation of nations and of human societies.

The rise in prices, the confrontation of markets, and the crisis of raw materials cannot be attributed to the Third World. In the final analysis, this situation has been determined and brought about by the inability of the great industrial nations to submit their production model to a system of international solidarity, shared development, and interdependence based on equity and justice. Therefore, it is absolutely erroneous to believe that the inflation and the food scarcity have resulted from the new positions adopted by the proletarian countries. On the contrary, the truth is that the present crisis is not the result of rising raw materials' prices, but has been created by the failure of the international order of industrial and political imperialism to respond to the enormous problems derived from historical change with solutions that would serve all peoples alike. By attempting to maintain the established order, they have awakened the uncontrollable reaction of the peoples who aspire to sovereignty over their resources and the full liberalization of their political destiny.

We therefore affirm that underdevelopment, like inflation, is not an isolated fact but rather the specific result of a socio-economic and political degradation that affects numerous aspects of the global process. In short, underdevelopment cannot be understood without reference to the unequal relations imposed by force during past centuries. On the contrary, it might even be said that it constitutes the normal complement of the prevailing world system. It is in direct correspondence to a growth model that generates imbalance both at home and abroad.

It is in this respect that our civilization, fundamentally based on the absence of solidarity, has almost completely failed. That civilization has produced means which, properly employed, might be expected to result not only in the transformation but also in the creation of funds, resources and technology which in practice should form part of the collective patrimony of an interdependent humanity.

The consumer and waste society has upset the essential priorities of human development. The famine that today is paralyzing the activities of entire nations has been manufactured with the same detachment as that employed in the construction of an atomic bomb. The progressive transformation of cereals and grains into meat that makes overconsumption of meat in certain affluent areas of the world possible, destroy the possibility of a sufficient amount of protein in other parts of the world.

As a final connotation of this process, and in a similar way, the information and advertising media have transformed entire generations into consumers of superfluous products. This is the rationalized and television-directed expression of the imposition of consumer spending and patterns on a universal scale. This encourages the proposal of a new way of food consumption at a world level, of a new idea of life and international solidarity.

In response to such problems, Mexico proposed the urgent need for the creation of a World Food and Agriculture Research Bank. In just a few months it has been shown that this concern was not a utopian one, but was based on the scientific prediction of events to come. Famine, which today affects several hundred million human beings - and will affect many more in the future - is but one link in an entire chain of circumstances: soil erosion, irrational cultivation, economic underdevelopment, the deficiencies that stem from lack of proteins, the growing scarcity of grains, and the alarming drop in world stocks of cereals.

Famine, I repeat, is not the essential factor. It is the entire chain of circumstances that is really decisive. The weakest link in the chain - food and petroleum - does not let us forget or alter the general causes that have led to overall imbalance. Any partial interpretation would, by its very nature, sooner or later fail, just as the show of international economic aid may be broadly said to have disintegrated and just as birth control programs launched independently of an overall plan of education and economic development have failed.

For that very reason we will denounce any attempt at converting the food shortage into a strategic pressure instrument to be used by the great producing countries. Such an attitude would be contrary to all the interest of mankind, and would imply building peace upon the imperatives of war.

In view of this we do not wish to speak to a subjective viewpoint, characterized by moralizing and evasiveness. We are proposing the essential need for a World Food Plan which will designate crop areas, make collective action possible, establish the bases for regulating the use of fertilizers, seeds and water, suggest new crops or new types of agricultural production and also provide true universal education as regards the value of food and the importance of protein in development. All this is possible at the present time. Artificial satellites, which provide vast amounts of information on soils and crops, together with the peaceful use of the atom, an invaluable source of energy, can broaden the human horizon if they are put to the service of mankind and not to that of power still conceived on the basis of primeval impulses.

The indispensable modernization and technical conversion of agriculture in the Third World is hindered by the protective agricultural systems used by the industrialized countries to protect their own agricultural production. Such practices inhibit both an increase in the production or quality of foods in developing countries and their improved distribution and financing. Crop diversification and greater productivity the result of rational use of the soil, are cancelled out by the requirements of an opulent society desirous of superfluous consumption and willing to pay the price for it. The dependent nations have no other alternative but to conform to the trends of the market. The demand for luxuries decides the orientation of their production no matter how absurd or anti-economic it may be.

Vast extensions of land which should be used to relieve the burden of food shortages are being used to satisfy unreasonable consumer habits. Animals high on the zoological scale disappear in deference to the dictates of fashion, or serve only to fatten pets, victims themselves of the hysteria of a society that has become so individualized as to convert its individual or collective selfishness into a moral code.

The agriculture of the countries of the Third World, an example of imperialistic exploitation within the context of the international division of labor, has at starvation prices exported the products that have made the industrial structures of the richest nations on earth profitable. Through the use of fertilizers and farm machinery - exports measured in man/hours - they bought up the crops which were the only economic patrimony of entire countries.

In the same manner, by means of devaluations or supranational protectionist mechanism - the European Common Market as an associated community or the United States as worldwide economic organization - the industrial powers have ruined or impeded the development of the world's agricultural societies.

On these two points we are in absolute agreement with Argentina and Cuba, but would like to add something more, namely that as is well known a large part of one-crop agriculture in the Third World was established within the specific sphere of the needs of the empires or transnational companies. The consequence of this system has been ecological imbalance, erosion, and the annual abandonment of hundreds of thousands of hectares in favor of continuing each year with a gigantic operation of geographic devastation.

The belief that ecological catastrophe is a phenomenon peculiar only to the advanced industrialized countries is a childish tale and a tragic smoke screen. Throughout the entire geographic hunger belt we find, as a specific feature, the imprinting of production dictated by the monopolistic empires.

The end result of the enormous agricultural erosion of the Third World deriving from high profits and exploitation will cause a tremendous worldwide commotion when scientific appraisal is made of its true magnitude. Meanwhile, we continue to sustain the myth of idyllic nature, without understanding the causes of the growing and frightful yearly expansion of large areas of drought, erosion, and hunger.

Although the relations among wealthy and proletarian countries show undeniable patterns of exploitation, this is nothing compared with the circle of oppression, decapitalization, and tyranny which have both commercially and economically governed the exchanges between imperialistic industry and the agriculture of the dependent nations. The change of our times will not be viable without a change in these relations of economic subjugation and tyranny on the political and social levels. Without a radical change between the dominant urban areas and the peripheral agricultural areas, all solutions will be insufficient and partial.

Today we are witness to the results of this irrationality. We are seeing the direct consequences of hunger. We contemplate the intolerable panorama of poverty for which we are all responsible, particularly those who foster waste and those who cultivate luxury surrounded by poverty. Unfortunately this also occurs specifically within the area of certain oligarchies in Third World countries.

Well known is the drama of hundreds of millions of human beings faced with the dramatic reality of hunger and sickness. Ecological threats and dangers to foodstuffs because of inefficient use of technical means of conservation in some cases or of the abuses which convert pharmacology, chemistry, and advertising into factors of the consumer structure itself without any regard for the imperatives of social and community interest is also known. Mexico, however, feels obliged to insist and repeat here today that this situation will not be remedied by isolated measures.

Hunger or soil erosion in the world cannot be corrected without changing the traditional structures of the contemporary power systems. Therefore, transnational corporations and their technical agents in the international raw materials stock markets, must not be the ones to regulate world trade supply and demand.

The rational change in this situation depends, first, on Governments recuperating their historical initiative vis-à-vis multinational corporations, and, second, on unity of organization among nations in order to be able to face their common problems through Government-to-Government purchasing, thus eliminating the vicious circle of intermediaries.

What we have expounded at all international forums has been the necessity for critical awareness of the breakdown of a civilization that is attempting to uphold the thesis that the evils it suffers are autonomous and capable of being separated one from the other, and not, as they really are, integrated and homologous forms of a world crisis within the system as a whole. This does not mean that possibilities do not exist for reaction from a world standpoint to the problems which because of their enormous proportions have become permanent and not occasional dilemmas.

In brief, we believe that the world today has revolutionary means at its disposal never before available to any other civilization. If they are put to the service of man, they can resolve the grim prospects of the present and the pessimistic forecast for the future. In this respect the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States seeks to define the rational premises of a new stage in the future of humanity.

Under the present circumstances food production has absolute priority, but this priority must be given to distribution instead of marketing, since marketing accentuates the injustice of consumer structure. In this aspect, the international community must make a supreme effort to reestablish equilibrium not only between the population and food but between the necessary proteins and economic and social progress, since the drama of underdevelopment is preceded by undernourishment. It is estimated that six grams of proteins a day make up the hunger ration in the developing countries, as compared to thirty grams consumed in the industrialized countries.

The basis of the problem, however, goes deeper than that, since marginalization of the masses in the countries of the Third World implies a substantial and unfair modification of the statistical data.

The most important thing is to create the necessary conditions for adequate nourishment and the Protein Revolution. On this point it is indispensable for the industrialized nations and the countries of the Third World to take two parallel actions: make a true account, world-wide in scope of their agricultural assets, and determine an immediate, middle-term and long-term project on priorities in basic food needs and the necessary protein consumption of the population of the world.

The food bank must also operate as a financing bank set up to foster agricultural development, promote-through a clearing house - international grain and food trade, and also take into account the interests of the highly technical agriculture, that still works in accordance with the principle of the maximum profit. This thought implies the study and analysis of production, distribution, marketing and food export policies. In this respect, it is necessary to provide the food bank with the financial means necessary for the immediate studies and technical cooperation that will make it possible to change the situation that prevails at present. The Earth's soil and population have to face the challenge that the consumer society has placed on its shoulders.

Food Bank or Financing Institution for Agricultural Development are not definite names. We must not engage our effort or honour in questions of semantics. Mexico invites you all to find an adequate formula, because peace or the dramatic continuation of the world crisis depend on it.

In summary, I understand that it is necessary to create a new institution, bank or fund, within the family of the United Nations for the financing of projects and programs for short and long term food development; for all developed and developing countries to contribute to this institution, in accordance with their resources and possibilities, and particularly those that have a favourable statement of accounts; for the institution to be administered by a council composed of the developed countries, the developing nations and the beneficiary countries; for the institution to be of a truly democratic nature and certain to correct abuses, influences, the ethnical centralization of power politics; that it promote high priority projects including agricultural inputs and the means of production related to the food industry; that it finance a system to ensure food; that it be understood that development is not only a question of material resources but an organization of men, social justice and a new world economic order; that the new institution does not repeat the pattern of bureaucratic inertia, slowness and inefficiency, but that it, nevertheless, profit from the experience of the existing organizations.

Ten thousand years ago, when the world had ten million inhabitants and man conquered incipient irrigation techniques, what has been called the first agricultural revolution took place. At the present time, to produce, create stocks and transform the protein levels of the world is man's highest conscious undertaking. The new agricultural revolution would not be the same as the one that took place ten thousand years ago, the one based on the first techniques. It would be a revolution of rational, scientific and financial cooperation among the contemporary societies.

It is for this reason that Mexico, in the face of apparently circumstantial crises, which nevertheless point to permanent social conflicts affecting all of mankind, reaffirms its hypothesis that the true solution will be found only when both means and ends, both rights and duties are subjected to the consensus of historic reasons and fundamental agreement among free and sovereign nations - especially all the Third World countries which will never again yield to the imperialistic or transnational idea of a logic of development that demonstrates with hunger and the destruction of the reserves of mankind's resources the sterility of a system that has even at the time of its greatest splendor been accompanied by worldwide poverty as its natural corollary.

The Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States could serve as an anti-inflationary instrument that responds to the most urgent needs not only of the proletarian countries but also of the advanced industrialized nations that have not been able to solve, nor will they solve, under the present circumstances, the critical and alarming increase in prices.

The cycle of unemployment and inflation which the arrogant industrialized nations thought was the natural correlate of the so-called "banana republics" has now passed from the peripheral area of underdevelopment to the central areas of the metropolises and that underdevelopment, in the strictest sense also affects many big industrial nations as a result of the very same disorders brought about by the economic model.

The causes of this ideological and institutional underdevelopment in the great industrial societies - underdevelopment which is also evident in their monetary and internal maladjustments - derive from the fact that they have not accepted the fact that the sphere of traditional power, the additional international power deriving from it, and the forced international division of labor have completed their historical cycle. Only a new framework of rights and duties will replace underdevelopment with humanly oriented development, and only a true change in options and priorities will be able to convert irrational growth into an economic and technical system that will make of material progress conscientious and critical proof of human progress.

At the end of several centuries our civilization, faced with hunger and underdevelopment, cannot be passed off as an example of the transformation of the world in the direction of equity and justice. The ideals of equality upon which economic and social systems were founded have created not only a differentiated world but also one founded on a tragic dichotomy.

Hunger, the cruelest human want, obliges us to seek and find real alternatives, particularly since the international community is in a process of transformation and it is no longer tolerable for this change to take place in a few islands of affluence and solitude. To prolong an obsolete structure will only increase inequalities and, consequently, social crises. It is our task to channel the changes which come about, guide transformation and foster new balances.

The objectives suggested to the Third World countries are associated with models of growth whose very high level of efficiency contrasts with their extreme inefficiency when the time comes for solutions and respect for the material requirements of the emerging nations. In other words, these are objectives which have in no instance satisfied mankind's highest aspirations. Nevertheless, we are not speaking of readapting old institutional mechanisms which have been superseded or of mimetically repeating models without taking into account the revolutionary strength of national cultures which, precisely because of their national character, give added dimension to the universal image of man.

The marginalized countries demand the right to build sovereign states, choose their own way of development and select their economic, political and social systems according to the will of their peoples.

These are the bases on which a new society can be built. It implies clear and critical awareness with regard to solidarity and interdependence. It links all states together and moves them to formulate common goals of shared well-being. It also presupposes a firm will to put into practice efficient standards of international cooperation.

The priorities that have governed economic activity to date have in many cases been contrary to mankind's overall interests. The enormous waste of material resources and of scientific and technological potential implicit in the armaments race contrasts cruelly with the hunger which now threatens the poorest nations and will ultimately threaten the most powerful. Irrational squandering of raw materials and natural resources in order to fulfill the supposed needs of a consumer society, a society which confronts the future with no plan other than that of responding to accidental or immediate circumstances, generates social and moral imbalance which in turn generates violence and anxiety.



We have exhausted natural resources in several fields of production. In others the large transnational corporations have discovered and kept secret deposits which only they knew existed and which they now use as a means of pressure to create confusion and thus contradictory situations within a particular nation or between it and other nations. Falsification of information in the service of reactionary terrorism is only another form of political warfare.

We know however, that there are sufficient resources on the earth to meet foreseeable population growth in years to come. All depends on the solidary spirit that men and nations are able to display. But it will not be words, but deeds; it will not be speeches, but the decisions we make which will show us if the technological age is in the service of man - not of the individual man, but of societies organized in a national and worldwide revolutionary undertaking.