

UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.
LIMITED
E/CONF.65/PREP/L.10
30 September 1974
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR
THE WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE
Third session
Rome, 23 September - 4 October 1974
Agenda item 5

THE WORLD FOOD PROBLEM: PROPOSALS FOR NATIONAL AND
INTERNATIONAL ACTION

Statement made by the Secretary-General of the Conference,
Mr. Sayed Marei, at the 33rd meeting of the Preparatory
Committee on 30 September 1974

I wish to comment on certain views expressed by a number of distinguished delegates and to clarify certain points that have been raised in the course of the discussion, hoping that this may be of some help to this Committee.

I think it is advisable at this stage to look ahead, and, in so doing, try to get the right perspective for the work of this Committee.

You will all remember that during the first session of the Preparatory Committee, which was held in New York, I said that this Conference differs from all the others in that it is taking place at a time when some parts of the world are facing famine and starvation, and perhaps others may face the same fate just when the Conference is meeting. Most countries are facing serious problems resulting from soaring prices of food and other essentials. Food production is being adversely affected by higher costs of agricultural inputs, especially fertilizers.

Because of the urgency of these problems, the United Nations called for this Conference at short notice. It must not disappoint mankind whose hopes for a better future hang on a fruitful outcome of this world meeting. In view of all this, I pleaded at the first session of the Preparatory Committee that our discussions and attempts at providing solutions must be conducted in a business-like manner. I am happy that the discussions which have taken place so far have been constructive and there seems to be a sincere and common search for workable solutions for the food problem facing mankind.

The Second Session of the Preparatory Committee, held in Geneva, not only discussed the Assessment paper but at the same time paved the way for the preparation of the second major document of the Conference - "Proposals for National and International Action".

We have now arrived at a stage when a consensus on the overall strategy needs to be achieved. If it is agreed that a substantial increase in investment for agricultural development is to be achieved; that a large and sustained increase in concessional food aid should be secured; that a coordinated stocks policy for food is necessary to protect world producers and consumers against undue fluctuations in supplies and prices of basic foodstuffs, and if it is agreed that all these measures have to be taken within a framework of international cooperation, only then can the Conference move on to the consideration of ways and means by which the agreed decisions could be implemented.

Once the broad consensus on objectives and the overall strategy is attained, the next step before this Committee would be to determine the best way to translate these objectives and this strategy into concrete proposals, programmes and policies which it could recommend to the Conference. To facilitate this task we have already presented in the Document a wide range of such proposals. In the discussions last week the delegates of Canada, Brazil and several other delegates have rightly emphasized the need for selecting out of these proposals specific recommendations which should receive priority attention of the Committee.

Taking into account the consensus so far reached on broad objectives by the meeting of Interested Delegations; the discussions so far on the proposals presented in the document on National and International Action; and the suggestion by several delegations asking my suggestions for a minimal list of priority items for action; I would like to share with you my thinking on the identification of priority proposals to facilitate the task of the Committee and its Working Group.

The proposals before the Committee and those that go before the Conference might fall into three broad categories:

- 1) Broad objectives and principles on the basis of which solutions to the world food problem have to be found.
- 2) Specific proposals on which it is possible to get a clear-cut understanding or commitment for national and international action.
- 3) The rest of the recommendations of a general nature addressed to national governments or international agencies.

The meeting of Interested Delegations has already made considerable progress with regard to the first category on objectives and principles. The meeting also felt that these broad objectives and principles might be usefully included in a general declaration which the Conference might consider for adoption.

The recommendations in the second category constitute the hard core of the work of the Conference. The Preparatory Committee could greatly facilitate the task of the Conference if it could identify the specific topics on which it might consider the adoption of specific resolutions. The rest of the proposals in category (3) could be reflected in the report of the Conference.

The discussions of sub-items (a), (b), (c) and (d) of item 9 of the provisional agenda in this Committee have already provided a reasonable basis to identify topics to which most governments attach high priority and on which they would like the Conference to take specific decisions or recommend specific actions.

In the light of this debate, the following ten topics would seem to be appropriate for the adoption of specific resolutions. The identification of these topics for priority action does not mean that the other proposals are not important.

SECTION I

1) Specific food production goals or targets and the relationship of these targets to broad development objectives, Second Development Decade strategy, the action programme of the General Assembly Special Session, and its next year's special session on development.

2) Priorities of agricultural and rural development including appropriate agrarian reforms, to ensure greater financial and policy support by national governments; and identification of programmes and policies that are particularly important for the attainment of food production objectives in different regions.

3) Main elements of a world fertilizer policy to tackle the short-term fertilizer problem and to provide the basis for a significant expansion in fertilizer production capacity in countries that possess natural gas or phosphate rock to support an export-oriented fertilizer industry, and in other developing countries which do not have the basic raw materials but where specific local factors justify such investment.

4) Research and technology to expand international research programmes for developing countries and to improve the capacity of developing countries to expand their own applied research programmes.

SECTION II

5) A consolidated resolution on nutrition programmes and policies to underline the urgency of longer-term food and nutrition policies coupled with specific programmes to improve the nutritional status of under-privileged groups in the intermediate period.

SECTION III

6) The establishment of a food information and early warning system with the cooperation of all governments.

7) Food security to reaffirm the common responsibility of the entire international community to ensure a greater food security through coordinated policies of stock-holding, and to identify the manner in which this responsibility can be defined more concretely by the Conference.

8) Food aid policies and programmes to reflect the concept of forward planning of agriculture and greater continuity in the level of food aid with improved arrangements for meeting emergency food aid needs, and improved coordination of food aid policies and programmes.

SECTION IV

9) Price stabilisation to affirm the importance of greater stability in food prices and of intergovernmental cooperation in evolving acceptable stabilization arrangements.

10) Improved trading arrangements and adjustment framework, to increase the food import capacity of developing countries and to give an adequate share to food-exporting developing countries in the future world trade in food products.

.....

The Secretariat would be ready to prepare for formal or informal discussion draft resolutions on any of these topics if the governments so desire. These will, no doubt, be based on the proposals in the document taking into account the main conclusions of the debate on specific subjects in the last week.

In addition to these specific ten subjects whose relative priority was clearly reflected in the debate last week, there would be need to reach some consensus on the question of (a) Flow of larger resources for agricultural development; and (b) follow-up action to implement the proposals coming out of the Conference. But discussions of these inter-related subjects will be taken up later today. May I now make a few brief comments to facilitate your discussion of section 5 of the Action document.

A very useful starting point for the Committee's discussion on section 5 of the Action document is provided by the report of the meeting of Interested Delegations. Paragraph 7 of this Report summarises the main points on which it was possible for the meeting to reach agreement. These include:

- Main elements of a world food policy as summarized in paragraph 655 of the document; that is, provision of additional resources to increase food production; need to improve food aid and other measures to improve nutrition; and, thirdly, the need to ensure greater food security.
- The need for an integrated approach to solve the world food problem.
- The need to consider all the specific proposals as complementary elements in an integrated approach along with the Secretariat proposals which have taken into account several essentials of the individual proposals.

.....

It is important to clarify here that we are talking about an integrated approach that takes into account the specific functions that need to be performed in relation to the objectives that are being proposed to the Conference, and a follow-up action. These objectives are:

- 1) Increasing the flow of external resources to promote agricultural development in developing countries;
- 2) Coordinating national and international policies on food aid and food security;
- 3) Promoting joint ventures among oil-producing countries, private companies who have technical competence, and developing countries with markets;
- 4) Promoting linkages between foreign private capital and developing countries in a variety of agricultural enterprises, including food processing, sugar refining and meat production;
- 5) Financing food stocks in developing countries;
- 6) Helping to finance unfilled food requirements in countries which have chronic food deficits and insufficient resources to pay for all the food imports they need;
- 7) Promoting major land use and irrigation projects in areas such as the Sahel, and in some of the world's great River Basins where substantial investment will be required for long-term development of the areas' great food production potential, through the financing of regional or sub-regional development agencies.

When it comes to the follow-up action, the Secretariat proposal of a World Food Authority is, in effect, an integrated realization of these objectives through a new coordinating mechanism. Here, I would like to mention that one need not cling to the name "World Food Authority". Whether this appellation is applied, or any other,

is not the issue. The main goal is, firstly, the integration of all these objectives; and, secondly, the provision of a follow-up mechanism. Undoubtedly, the nature of institutional arrangements needed to achieve the desired objectives will depend on more detailed discussions among governments.

.....

In proceeding from significant elements of consensus to give concrete shape to an agreed approach, we have to take into account, as already emphasized by several delegates, the possibility of mobilizing additional resources for agricultural development from the traditional donors and from what is now being called potential donors. I am speaking about a new flow of resources.

In the last few days, I have intensified my contacts with the potential donors and I am greatly encouraged by the reactions I have so far received. The consideration of this matter and the related proposals is now approaching a stage where more clear indications should be available very soon. I hope I will be able to report again on this subject later.

May I refer briefly to another matter which occupies the minds of delegations who are neither traditional donors nor potential donors. These are the countries which are worst hit by food shortages. They have pitched their hopes on the Conference for finding solutions to their immediate and long-term problems. Many of the proposals suggested to the Conference are geared to the medium term but it is most urgent that high priority consideration be given now on an emergency basis to such matters as food aid to hungry people, and fertilizer and other inputs for the next crop in many countries.

Those countries are not mere spectators, but wish to participate to the best of their abilities in the hammering out of conflicting interests and ideologies. This is the essence of international economic cooperation, and I fervently hope that our future work at this Committee is inspired and guided by this spirit which could give the forthcoming World Conference its distinctive character and unique place in history.