

1584th meeting

Wednesday, 12 December 1973, at 11.25 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Zewde GABRE-SELLASSIE (Ethiopia).

A/C.2/SR.1584

AGENDA ITEM 105

Convocation of a world food conference under the auspices of the United Nations (A/9003/Add.1 (part VI) and Corr.1, A/9003/Add.1 (part VII), A/C.2/287, A/C.2/L.1339)

1. Mr. OLIVERI LOPEZ (Argentina) said that, as a member of the Economic and Social Council, he had had an opportunity in that forum to express his Government's feelings on the convening of a world food conference under the auspices of the United Nations, at the 1886th meeting on the previous day. He added that the word "forum" in the second preambular paragraph of the draft resolution recommended by the Council (A/C.2/287, annex) had been rendered in the Spanish text as "*órgano central*". He suggested that the "*foro*" or "*tribuno*" should be used, which would bring the Spanish text into line with the original text.

2. Mr. CORDOVEZ (Secretary of the Committee) said that the point raised by the representative of Argentina would be taken care of. He pointed out that the last phrase of the third preambular paragraph of the draft resolution to be submitted to the General Assembly should read: "... consumption and trade of developing countries". Although the English version of the text was correct, the French, Russian and Spanish versions were not.

3. Mr. CHHETRI (Bhutan) said that his country had a subsistence-level agrarian economy and was confronted with the problems of population growth. Agriculture was the backbone of the Bhutan economy and needed to be developed on a scientific basis in order to ensure self-sufficiency in food and provide buffer stocks to mitigate supply and price fluctuations. Furthermore, if industrialization was to make steady progress with a contented labour force, an uninterrupted supply of food at low but constant prices was essential. Agricultural production should therefore be given the highest priority in developing countries.

4. The forthcoming World Food Conference, together with the World Population Conference, would explore possible solutions to the problems of the ever-widening gap between rich and poor, and over-population. His Government was prepared to extend all co-operation in that field. In his delegation's view, the chief prerequisite was a thorough study of past failures in growing and conserving food, particularly in countries with chronic deficits. Consideration should also be given to the advantages and disadvantages of the green revolution and the transfer of modern agricultural techniques, such as the use of improved seeds and fertilizer, and storage in the tropical developing countries. The creation of a world food bank under the auspices of FAO offered tremendous possibilities and should be seriously considered. The developing countries should give priority to a programme of action involving mass

participation in agricultural production, structural changes, as far as practicable, in land tenure, limitations on land holdings and rural credit. His delegation supported the draft resolution.

5. Mr. KARHILO (Finland) said that his delegation welcomed the consensus reached at the resumed fifty-fifth session of the Economic and Social Council on the World Food Conference, which justified the hope that a similar co-operative and constructive spirit would prevail during the Conference. As he had stated in the general debate (1518th meeting), his Government was fully committed to working for the successful outcome of the Conference.

6. Current and future food problems needed to be tackled in the broader context of international economic and social co-operation, as stated in the first preambular paragraph of the draft resolution. Those problems required the widest possible participation of Member States and the international organizations concerned, both at the Conference and during the preparatory work. His delegation shared the concern expressed in the Council regarding the limited time available for the preparation of the Conference; however, the urgency of the world food situation justified the convening of the Conference in November 1974. His delegation supported the proposal, in paragraph 3 of the draft resolution, that the Economic and Social Council should be entrusted with over-all responsibility for the Conference. He was confident that the Council would take all the necessary steps to that end at its organizational session in January 1974. The role of the Council was most important, in that it could ensure that the World Food Conference was accorded its proper place in the over-all context of development and international economic co-operation. Nevertheless, ultimately it was for the participating Member States themselves to ensure that the Conference adopted the broad, integrated approach required. The interest already shown by United Nations bodies, particularly FAO, in the Conference indicated their awareness of the many aspects of the problem which must be taken into account.

7. In conclusion, he joined in the expressions of appreciation voiced in the Council for the generous offer of the Government of Italy to act as host for the Conference.

8. Mr. ZACHMANN (German Democratic Republic) said that the struggle against hunger and malnutrition was a very important concern of all humanity. It was doubtful whether the World Food Conference, to be convened in a relatively short time, would be able to solve all existing problems. However, it would be useful if it disclosed the causes of food crises and found ways to ensure a stable supply of food-stuffs. He pointed out, in that connexion, that despite food shortages in many countries, food crops were destroyed or financial compensation was paid for leaving arable land

unused in order to manipulate prices and achieve the highest possible profit.

9. To solve the pressing food problems in many developing countries was undoubtedly an extremely complex task. Hunger was a social and political problem, the result of the backwardness caused by colonialism. Therefore, in his delegation's view, the implementation of genuine socio-economic change, particularly through land reform and the development of co-operatives, was a prerequisite for mobilizing the resources of the developing countries for the solution of the food problem. The World Food Conference should discuss the planning and control of the food economy by Governments, the expansion of production through the systematic use of all arable land and the intensification of production from arable land already under cultivation. His delegation supported the proposal for the establishment of a preparatory committee for the Conference and was prepared to participate in its work. All States whose policy was in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations should be permitted to participate on an equal footing. His delegation was convinced that the current movement towards political détente and peaceful co-operation offered real prospects of achieving the progress on world food problems that was so vital for millions of people.

10. Mr. ARVESEN (Norway) said that his delegation welcomed the proposal to convene a world food conference under the auspices of the United Nations and hoped that there would be the widest possible participation in the Conference. Obviously, the international community should make every effort to solve the world food problem, and the consensus on that issue was to be welcomed. The draft resolution contained adequate guidelines for the preparatory work. His Government would participate in the intergovernmental preparatory committee, which, in view of the short time available, should begin its work as soon as possible. He expressed appreciation of the Italian Government's offer to act as host to the Conference.

11. Mr. GHORRA (Lebanon) said that the comments of preceding speakers had made it unnecessary for him to make the statement he had prepared. There was general agreement in the Committee on the draft resolution: members agreed that the World Food Conference should tackle the critical food problems of the world within the framework of the United Nations and with the particular collaboration of FAO. Furthermore, the Committee was agreed on its appreciation of the fact that the recommendations¹ of the Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Countries, held at Algiers from 5 to 9 September 1973, had been incorporated in the draft resolution and that the United States had taken the lead in proposing the item under consideration at the beginning of the session. He joined previous speakers in expressing his appreciation to the Italian Government for offering to provide host facilities for the Conference.

Mr. Arvesen (Norway) took the Chair.

12. Mr. SKOGLUND (Sweden) welcomed the proposal to convene a world food conference in 1974. It would attract world attention to the problem of hunger and malnutrition, and provide a forum for the formulation of practical steps to improve world food security. It

was very satisfying to note that the informal consultations had led to such a widely acceptable text.

13. Obviously, the problem of hunger and malnutrition in large areas of the world was a highly complex one. A long-term solution to the food problems of the developing countries must be sought primarily through an increase in their food production. The question should be dealt with in an integrated manner, with due consideration being given to the many factors which influenced the production and final consumption of food-stuffs. While his delegation endorsed the first preambular paragraph of the draft resolution, it felt that the Conference could not cover all aspects of the situation and that it should concentrate on a few priority areas, if it was to be truly action-oriented. The fundamental food needs of the world, for example, should be assessed by analysing existing data. Other related aspects which should be considered were employment and income distribution. Consumer demand was obviously dependent on the pattern of income distribution, which, in turn, was closely related to the availability of employment. Land tenure and land ownership patterns could directly affect both income and employment for large sectors of the rural population. One of the major tasks of the Conference would be find ways to promote agricultural production in developing countries. For example, the experience gained with high-yielding grain varieties should be studied, as should alternative strategies for agricultural development in relation to the social and economic factors he had referred to.

14. In addition to the long-term solutions, the Conference should also devise methods of providing speedy and efficient emergency assistance and building up adequate food reserves to meet urgent needs. His Government supported the concept of a world food security scheme. In conclusion, he thanked the Italian Government for its invitation to the Assembly to convene the Conference in Rome. His Government intended to take an active part in the work of the preparatory committee for the Conference.

15. Mr. ROUGET (Federal Republic of Germany) said that tragic events in recent years had highlighted the precariousness of the world food situation. It was clear that new approaches were needed to tackle the problem, which was far more complex than at first believed. The Federal Chancellor, speaking for his delegation in the General Assembly on 26 September (2128th plenary meeting), had emphasized the need to guarantee a sufficient supply of food to keep large sections of mankind from hunger and to draw up a world food plan which would prevent disaster through an integrated strategy for the production and distribution of food.

16. His delegation welcomed the timely proposal by the United States to convene a world food conference under the auspices of the United Nations. The Conference should provide an opportunity to expand international co-operation on food issues and to initiate practical action in specific fields where early progress in international co-operation was possible. The convening of the Conference would, in itself, raise hopes among much of the world's population and those hopes should not be disappointed. Very careful preparations should therefore be made for the Conference.

17. It was understandable that the developing countries should wish to have the issue considered in the

¹ See A/9330, p. 99.

broader context of development assistance and trade relations. However, the success of the Conference could be threatened if those issues were discussed in all their diversity and complexity. Therefore, his delegation felt that the Conference should concentrate on a medium-term world food balance-sheet which took into account an analysis of production and its rates of growth in developing countries, food demand, distribution of purchasing power, population growth and employment. Furthermore, the Conference should deal with food security, with particular emphasis on production, with a view to the development and maintenance of food stocks and the co-ordination of international disaster relief. In that context, the problem of protein deficiency was also important.

18. His delegation welcomed the decision of the Economic and Social Council to set up an open-ended preparatory committee. It believed that all Member States, especially major producing and consuming countries, should participate in the Conference and in its preparatory work if the Conference was to be a success. His delegation offered its full co-operation in both the preparatory work and the Conference and expressed its gratitude to the Government of Italy for its generous offer to provide host facilities in Rome.

19. Mr. GORITZA (Romania) shared the view that the convening of a world food conference was one of the most important actions taken at the current session. It demonstrated the capacity of the United Nations to respond to the major requirements of its members in the field of economic and social development. His delegation attached special importance to the description of the Conference's principal task contained in the first preambular paragraph of the draft resolution and to the conclusion, in the third preambular paragraph, that the Conference would make a major contribution to the achievement of the goals of the International Development Strategy.

20. At the seventeenth session of the FAO Conference, Romania had supported the idea of a world food conference and had stressed the need for specific measures in favour of the developing countries, including assistance in increasing agricultural output, increased development aid and better trading conditions for agricultural products. It was in the same spirit that his delegation supported the draft resolution before the Committee. His delegation was prepared to participate actively in both the preparatory committee and the Conference.

21. Mr. KANKA (Czechoslovakia) pointed out that three major conferences were to be held in 1974, the World Population Conference, the Third Conference on the Law of the Sea and the World Food Conference. All dealt with important questions, and a great deal of preparatory work was required if they were to be successful. It was for that reason that his delegation had asked the seventeenth session of the FAO Conference to consider seriously whether it was appropriate to hold the World Food Conference in 1974.

22. His Government believed that the long-term solution to the food problem, which affected the developing countries in particular, was to be found in a reform of agriculture in the developing countries on the basis of planning, effective utilization of all resources and the rational use of the experience of other countries. There was need for land reforms, co-operative agricultural

production and expansion of the State sector. None the less his delegation would support the draft resolution as it stood, and was prepared to participate in both the Conference and the preparatory committee.

23. Mr. OROSA (Philippines) said his delegation's sponsorship of the Council resolution reproduced in document A/C.2/287 was a measure of the importance it attached to collective action at the global level towards ensuring a minimum food supply for the needy peoples of the world. While recent events had dramatically illustrated the need for a concerted international policy to maintain food reserves against the threat of famine, the problems of food supply, consumption and distribution had to be resolved in the light of the objectives of the International Development Strategy. The World Conference would, therefore, have to consider a policy to guarantee minimum world food security, requiring the formulation and co-ordination of national stockpiling policies, continuing review and evaluation of the adequacy of actual and projected grain stocks, and a system for the exchange of the information thus obtained. In view of the inadequate financial and technical resources of developing countries, special emphasis would have to be given to expanding international aid to developing countries to support their national stockpiling policies. The Conference would also have to consider the fundamental problems affecting the adequacy of world food supplies. The objectives of a minimum world food security policy, for example, would clearly be promoted by efforts to increase food production in developing countries and to stabilize world agricultural trade.

24. The precise scope of the Conference would be determined by the preparatory committee, which would, he hoped, start work as soon as possible. His delegation intended to serve on that committee.

25. Mr. ČABRIĆ (Yugoslavia) said he hoped the Committee would follow the lead of the Economic and Social Council in deciding unanimously and without a vote to call for the convening of a world food conference. It should be left to the preparatory committee, of which his delegation wished to be a member, to determine the scope and agenda of the Conference on the basis of the information submitted by FAO, UNCTAD and other competent United Nations bodies. The preparatory committee should determine the extent to which the Conference would deal with food production and trade, but it was certain that, if hunger was to be eradicated, those problems, and especially their impact on the developing countries, would have to be tackled. The Conference would be too short to permit complex negotiations, but it should be able to establish the main principles and political guidelines for solving the world food problem. He agreed with those delegations which had said that all interested States should be able to participate in the Conference on an equal footing.

26. Mr. DELIVANIS (Greece) welcomed the Council's unanimous support for the convening of a world food conference. He hoped that adequate preparations would be made for the Conference and that the participants would not overlook the fact that food supplies depended on the ability and will to produce of the world's farmers, which were in turn governed by the price farmers received for their products. Failure to establish satisfactory price levels would, as experience

had shown, lead to disastrous results. There should be no repetition of that lack of concern for agriculture.

27. Mr. LOBANOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) pointed out that, in supporting the proposed world food conference in the Council, his delegation had stressed that in order to solve the world food problem, a series of interrelated measures designed to improve world agricultural output had to receive attention. In that connexion, he agreed with the conclusions of the FAO Conference reproduced in the third preambular paragraph of the Council resolution, and supported the developing countries in their demand that UNCTAD should play an active part in the preparations for the Conference.

28. The Governments and the United Nations organs participating in the Conference would need to make careful preparations at both the national and international levels. For that reason, and in view of the necessarily heavy workload resulting from the World Population Conference, the Conference on the Law of the Sea and the twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly, his delegation had considerable doubts about the wisdom of convening the World Food Conference in 1974. It would revert to that matter in the preparatory committee, of which it wished to be a member.

29. The draft resolution contained no stipulation as to which States could participate in the Conference. However, no objection had been raised to the interpretation given by the representative of the Ukrainian SSR of paragraph 1 of the Council resolution, to the effect that all interested States could participate in both the preparatory committee and the Conference. His delegation shared that interpretation and would act accordingly.

30. Mr. SHEMIRANI (Iran) said that his delegation was pleased that informal consultations had produced a consensus on the convening of the World Food Conference. That agreement was an indication that the international community was aware of the necessity of improving world food security. Furthermore, the very fact that a decision had been reached by consensus on so important a question, as had been the case for other draft resolutions of the Second Committee, indicated the development of a new trend which should be reinforced as often as possible. He thanked the Government of Italy, through its delegation, for its offer to act as host to the Conference.

31. Mr. BENNANI (Morocco) said that his delegation, too, was pleased that the consultations had resulted in a consensus. Had his country been a member of the Economic and Social Council, it would have been a sponsor of the draft resolution, since it had supported the decision at the Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries calling for the convening of a joint FAO/UNCTAD conference on food problems. His delegation was willing to participate in the work of the preparatory committee and hoped that the Conference would obtain results that could serve as guidelines for a special session of the General Assembly in 1975.

32. His delegation thanked the Government of Italy for its generous invitation.

33. Mr. ABHYANKAR (India) said that his delegation, which had supported the Economic and Social

Council resolution, hoped that the Committee would approve the draft resolution by consensus, so that the preparatory committee, in which India wished to participate actively, could begin its work without delay.

34. Mr. GALLARDO MORENO (Mexico) said that his delegation was pleased that the negotiations had led to the draft resolution before the Committee. His country was facing serious problems in food production and distribution, because of the rapid increase in its population. In 1974 there would be an important meeting in Mexico on those problems. His Government was conducting research on the production of high-nutrition food-stuffs and would make the results available to the preparatory committee. His delegation was interested in participating in the work of the preparatory committee. It endorsed the appreciation expressed to the Government of Italy and was pleased that the Conference would be convened in the Eternal City.

35. Mr. ELIASHIV (Israel) said that his delegation fully shared the general anxiety about the critical shortage of food in the world and supported the special measures, priorities and action programmes aimed at meeting those problems. In that connexion, it welcomed the United States initiative in calling for the convening of a world food conference under the auspices of the United Nations, and the prompt response by FAO. His delegation hoped that consideration of the problem would result in action to ensure that a minimum level of world security was maintained against serious food shortages in periods of crop failure or natural disaster. National food stock policy had been known since biblical times: following the example of Joseph, and on his advice, ancient Egypt had established a reserve of cereals in years of abundance for use in years of scarcity. Similar recommendations were timely and useful in the current situation and should be considered from a world-wide standpoint.

36. Some aspects of the problem of the danger of famine in the developing world could be solved by a rapid rise in agricultural output and accelerated industrialization. However, the key to such an integrated approach to agricultural development and industrialization lay in the provision of capital and combined economic and technological progress.

37. His delegation welcomed the invitation of the Italian Government to act as host to the Conference and fully supported the draft resolution before the Committee.

38. Mr. GEBRU (Ethiopia) said that agriculture was not fully exploited in his country owing to its inadequate infrastructure and unfavourable climatic conditions, which could produce drought and famine. Even when there was a food surplus in one region, there were problems in distributing it in crisis areas. International assistance was needed, and his delegation therefore welcomed the convening of the Conference and hoped that it would succeed in drawing the attention of world opinion to the need for short-term and long-term measures.

39. Mr. FASLA (Algeria) said that his delegation was gratified to note that the draft resolution embodied the recommendation of the Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries. It welcomed the spirit of co-operation within the Committee, which had resulted in an acceptable draft resolution embody-

ing the objectives of the developing countries and the international community. Member States, especially the developed countries, had the capacity, given the political will, to resolve the problems of hunger in the third world. For that reason, his delegation was pleased that the preamble of the draft resolution emphasized additional measures for increasing the food production, consumption and trade of developing countries. Participation by FAO and UNCTAD in the work of the preparatory committee was essential. Furthermore, participation should be open to all members of the international community through the legitimate representatives of their peoples. His delegation thanked the Government of Italy for its offer to act as host to the Conference.

40. Mr. DIALLO (Upper Volta) said that his delegation welcomed the decision to hold the Conference and was pleased that all countries, including the non-aligned countries, had been able to reach agreement on the text of the draft resolution at the Algiers Conference. His country had supported the decision concerning a conference on world food problems, and his delegation had maintained its interest in that question during the current session of the Assembly. His country was situated in a region that had been experiencing deficits in its food production owing to natural disasters. His delegation therefore hoped that the Conference would produce both a system for adequate stockpiling of food-stuffs and a strategy for agricultural development in the developing countries that would facilitate international trade in their food products.

41. His delegation thanked the Government of Italy for its invitation. It welcomed the fact that participation in the Conference would be open to all, including the Government of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, the legitimate representative of the people of that country. UNCTAD and FAO had important contributions to make in view of their responsibilities for trade and food production. His delegation supported the draft resolution and hoped that it would be approved unanimously.

42. Mr. LOHANI (Nepal) said that the Conference provided an opportunity for the international community to develop policies for solving the problem of world food shortage. His country gave high priority to agriculture, but its current efforts were being frustrated by drought. It needed adequate irrigation facilities and hoped that the Conference would take into account the needs of developing countries, especially with regard to irrigation. His delegation supported the draft resolution.

43. Mr. CAVAGLIERI (Italy) said that his Government was pleased that the Conference would be held in

Rome. His Government's interest in the world food situation was indicated by its offer to act as host to the Conference, and it would spare no effort to ensure the success of the event. It would welcome consensus action by the General Assembly on the draft resolution. His delegation would participate in the preparatory activities for the Conference.

44. Mr. SCHRAM (Iceland) said that his delegation supported the draft resolution and thanked the Government of Italy for its generous offer. The world-wide food shortage was a major problem, and the United Nations should intensify its efforts to solve it. The situation was becoming worse and a crisis stage was rapidly approaching as both land and marine resources were depleted. The main aim of the Conference should be to determine the new measures which were urgently needed to maximize production. Products such as fish protein concentrates for human consumption might well be the key to solving nutritional problems in many parts of the developing world.

45. His delegation welcomed the idea of minimum world food security advanced by FAO. In addition, however, a world food fund or bank should be established under FAO for the independent control of food resources, with a view to preventing famines, such as that which had recently occurred in the Sudano-Saharan region. His Government pledged its support for all future United Nations efforts to alleviate the world food shortage.

46. Mr. KITCHEN (United States of America) said that his delegation was gratified that the Committee was about to act on an initiative by its Government. He was grateful for the co-operation of other delegations, and looked forward to full participation in the work of the preparatory committee and the Conference itself.

47. Mr. ARUEDE (Nigeria) said that his delegation supported the convening of the Conference and hoped that it would provide long-term solutions to the problems of food production, especially in the developing countries. He also hoped that solutions could be found to the problems of providing assistance to countries in time of major emergencies, such as those caused by drought.

48. The CHAIRMAN announced that the Committee had concluded its discussion of the item and suggested that it should take a decision on the draft resolution at the following meeting.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.