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ASSISTANCE IN CASES OF NATURAL DISASTER  
AND OTHER DISASTER SITUATIONS

Aid to the Sudano-Sahelian populations  
threatened with famine

Report of the Secretary-General

1. At its twenty-eighth session, the General Assembly, under the item entitled "Assistance in cases of natural disaster and other disaster situations", 1/ adopted resolution 3153 (XXVIII) of 14 December 1973 entitled "Aid to the Sudano-Sahelian populations threatened with famine". In that resolution, the General Assembly, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to continue to take all necessary steps to provide the most effective possible material and financial assistance, in co-operation with the organs and agencies concerned, to the drought-affected Sudano-Sahelian countries. It appealed once again to the Governments of Member States, to United Nations organs and programmes and to the specialized agencies, calling upon them, inter alia, to continue and to consider increasing their assistance to the Sudano-Sahelian countries within the framework of the emergency relief operations. In paragraph 4 of that resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its twenty-ninth session on the development of the situation.
2. As reported earlier (see A/9178), the Secretary-General, in response to paragraph 4 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1759 (LIV) of 18 May 1973, requested the Director-General of FAO to serve as United Nations focal point for emergency aid to the drought-stricken Sudano-Sahelian countries.
3. In accordance with his mandate, the Director-General of FAO, in May 1973, established the Office for the Sahelian Relief Operation (OSRO) in Rome. This office has been engaged in five major fields of activity with regard to emergency

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1/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-eighth Session, Annexes, agenda item 68.

relief operations, namely: (a) monitoring food shipments and co-ordinating overland movements and airlifts of food grains; (b) providing seeds; (c) supplying animal feed and vaccines; (d) co-operating with other members of the United Nations system in critical non-agricultural fields, such as health; and (e) serving as a central point for the collection and dissemination of information on the emergency relief efforts.

4. Following recommendations of the FAO multi-donor mission which visited the six countries of the Sudano-Sahelian area in September and October 1973 (see A/9178, para. 10), the Secretary-General and the Director-General of FAO issued a joint appeal on 26 November 1973 for food aid, protective foods and cash contributions required to support 1974 emergency operations. The General Assembly, in its resolution 3153 (XXVIII) of 14 December 1973, appealed to the Governments of Member States and others to consider increasing their assistance to the Sudano-Sahelian countries, with a specific reference to this appeal.

5. The Secretary-General and the Director-General of FAO made separate visits to a number of drought-affected countries early in 1974 which made it possible for them to examine the status of the United Nations emergency relief operations and, further, to stress the need for additional assistance.

6. Following the Secretary-General's visit, Mr. Bradford Morse, Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs, undertook a mission to several European capitals in order to mobilize resources for emergency relief and recovery operations. Furthermore, a special mission headed by Mr. I. S. Djermakoye, Under-Secretary-General, Commissioner for Technical Co-operation, visited two of the most affected countries, the Niger and Mali, and made recommendations for the intensification of some of the relief operations.

7. Donors responded generously to these appeals and to General Assembly resolution 3153 (XXVIII). The total availability of food from outside sources for the harvest year November 1973 to October 1974 is 1,137,000 metric tons, including 612,000 metric tons of new donations, 238,000 metric tons of supplies in the pipeline from previous allotments and 287,000 metric tons of commercial imports; firm commitments for protective foods stand at 49,600 metric tons.

8. Pledges from donors were listed in a shipping schedule prepared by OSRO in January 1974 and were discussed and finalized in a meeting of donors convened at Brussels by the European Economic Community (EEC) to exchange information on donations to the Sudano-Sahelian countries. OSRO took this opportunity to stress the need for early shipments to the recipient countries to enable the food to be transported to the remote areas and to ensure that each country received its monthly supply of food without interruption. OSRO also presented a transport plan to ensure the distribution of the food within the recipient countries and called for assistance in internal transportation, including civil and military convoys and the operating costs for inland transport.

9. In spite of these advance preparations by the donors and by OSRO, there were slippages owing to rising fuel costs and difficulties in procuring supplies in a dwindling market and in obtaining shipping space. The result was that the import

of food grains between December and March was slow, leading to a bunching of arrivals in April, May and June which caused congestion in ports and presented logistical problems in moving the supplies from the ports to the interior.

10. Special measures were taken to overcome these problems as it was imperative to evacuate as much as possible before the onset of the rains seriously dislocated the movement of supplies. As there were breakdowns in the railways, coupled with strikes and low operating performance, road transport was increasingly used, even though it involved increased costs owing to rising fuel prices. In the initial stages, OSRO subsidized these increased costs, although donors were quick to respond and meet such costs themselves. Meetings were held with oil companies to ensure adequate supplies of petroleum, oil and lubricants. Donors were consulted in the field and at Rome in a series of meetings which identified bottle-necks as they arose and quick solutions were found to overcome them in order to maintain a steady flow of supplies to the recipient countries. A team of experts, provided by Switzerland, examined the railway systems in Mali and Senegal and made recommendations for immediate and long-term measures to increase evacuation by rail. Port committees were set up in major ports to ensure speedy movement both by road and rail. The result was that evacuation rates exceeded 4,000 metric tons a day during the peak period in April, May and June.

11. Special measures were also taken to expedite internal transportation, particularly to the remote areas. Convoys of trucks crossed the Sahara to assist in the distribution of supplies; several countries donated trucks to increase the pool of transport available to the land-locked countries and special grants were made by OSRO and by bilateral donors to meet operating costs of inland transportation. To help in the operation of these programmes, OSRO appointed special volunteers from the Danish Army provided through the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). Transport operations in the Niger were also assisted by British mechanics, appointed by OSRO, to service the fleet of 30 trucks provided by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

12. The purpose of these measures was to have the food in position before the rains and thereby avoid costly airlifts. As the northern areas of Mali and the Niger did not have sufficient stocks, arrangements were made by the United States of America, in collaboration with OSRO, to move supplies across the Sahara. With the co-operation of the Government of Algeria and using the Algerian transport system, 1,500 metric tons were carried across the desert from Oran to Gao in Mali and a similar amount from Algiers to Agadez and other centres in northern Niger. The outcome was that the massive airlifts from the ports, which had characterized the operations the year before, were not needed in 1974.

13. It was not possible, however, to eliminate the use of airlifts altogether. In the Sahel, with the start of the rainy season, some roads become completely impassable leaving some areas totally cut off. Bilateral arrangements for airlifts were made in such cases but their incidence and extent were reduced by strengthening internal transport, trans-shipment across the Sahara and by the organization of camel transport in areas where vehicles could no longer pass in the rainy season. In the Niger, 2,000 metric tons of cereals were transported by special camel caravans organized by OSRO. In the Upper Volta, OSRO financed a scheme to manhandle supplies from one convoy to another across stretches rendered impassable by the rains.

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14. Health and nutritional measures to safeguard the population and protect the vulnerable groups have been tackled jointly by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) with OSRO acting as a focal point. UNICEF has a three-year programme to supply equipment and medicines, to strengthen and expand mobile dispensaries and to train personnel, and a joint programme with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to construct wells for drinking-water purposes. WHO, with financial support from OSRO, has provided stocks of drugs and medicaments for treatment against a number of communicable diseases in the area. Supplies have been moved by air to meet emergent needs. It is gratifying to note that major epidemics have been avoided.

15. The drought in 1973/1974 affected different countries in different ways. Chad, Mali and the Niger were the worst hit and required special attention on a problem-oriented basis. The health of the badly-affected population will need time to improve, although the measures now being undertaken will definitely have an impact. Special attention has been given to 10 camps in the Niger where conditions are reported to be extremely bad. With the co-operation of the League of Red Cross Societies, 10 medical/nutritional teams for 10 selected camps are being organized with the full support of the Government. Five of these camps were in position in September 1974. The League provides the personnel, WHO the medicines, UNICEF the protective foods and OSRO the transport. The work is co-ordinated through a committee at national level with the UNDP resident representative, representing OSRO, acting as Chairman. Mali has its own effective arrangements for health and nutritional feeding in its camps and so has Mauritania.

16. In addition to protective measures to improve health and nutrition, OSRO continued its efforts to pre-plan emergency programmes in selected areas to stimulate crop production and increase available supplies of food. These measures were limited in scope and applied only to those farmers who were forced to consume their seed last year or were unable to cultivate the food crop area required for immediate relief and recovery. In such areas OSRO, with financial assistance provided by the Federal Republic of Germany, supported a seed distribution programme, training for which was conducted at an OSRO instruction course at Dakar late last year. Insect infestation, which has been a recurring phenomenon in the Sahel, was also given attention by the provision of funds to the International Organization for the Control of the African Migratory Locust (OICMA) to expand its activities, and by the provision of limited amounts of insecticides to each of the Sudano-Sahelian countries to meet emergency needs. A well-defined programme covering animal health and feeding on a three-year basis has been drawn up by the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) in collaboration with bilateral donors.

17. The condition of the crops this year is reported to be good. Rainfall data, collated by the World Food Programme (WFP) from figures provided by 70 stations in Chad, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger, Senegal and the Upper Volta through ASECNA (Agence pour la sécurité de la navigation aérienne), have shown that there was a slow start in May and June when figures were only insignificantly higher than last year. However, in July, for the first time since 1969, rainfall exceeded the lean years' average by 7 per cent throughout all the countries with an increase of up to 26 per cent above normal in the eastern part of the Sudano-Sahelian belt.

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The distribution of the rain was also fairly good during July. Rainfall in August was widespread and above average. In fact, flooding was reported in several countries; some minor bridges were washed away and some persons were rendered homeless in major towns. As a result of the rain, all countries should expect a better crop than in previous years; however, it is still too early to forecast the final results of the 1974 harvest. The pasture conditions are also reported to have improved and the livestock which survived the ravages of previous years are in relatively good condition.

18. In spite of these circumstances, the crops in the Sudano-Sahelian countries cannot be expected to meet the needs of the population. The reasons are that it has not been possible to plant all cultivable areas as many farmers have dispersed in search of food and are living in camps or elsewhere; secondly, seed was not readily available in sufficient quantity where needed; and, thirdly, farmers and Governments have hardly any kind of stock. Food aid, therefore, will have to be provided for the period November 1974 to October 1975, although the aim should be to phase out the emergency operations as soon as conditions permit.

19. It was agreed in June, at a donors' meeting called by OSRO at Rome, and subsequently confirmed in July, during CILSS/OSRO meetings at Cotonou and Dakar, that plans for food aid and related requirements should be drawn up early. OSRO has prepared contingency plans to meet these needs. As was done in 1973/1974, the requirements of the affected countries for 1974/1975, as regards food, including protective foods, transport, storage, seed, logistical support and technical assistance, will be assessed by a high-level multi-donor mission with which CILSS, the United Nations Special Sahelian Office and the donors will be fully associated. For a realistic assessment of needs, the mission will become operative only in November 1974 when information about the actual harvest in different countries will be known. The mission will be preceded by technical evaluation teams to assess the 1973/1974 relief operation and the harvest prospects, the special needs of remote areas, the internal transport difficulties, and other relevant information that could be of value to the mission in its task.

20. Considering that donors will not be in a position to act on the recommendations of the mission until December at the earliest, it is necessary that a contingency programme be adopted to ensure a continuous supply of commodities between the end of the current relief operations (31 October 1974) and the practical implementation of the 1974/1975 programme. This programme will involve making advance allocations of food supplies which could subsequently be absorbed into pledges for the 1974/1975 programme as a whole.

21. The Director-General of FAO has invited principal donors to participate in the technical evaluation teams and the multi-donor mission. An advance allocation of 275,000 metric tons of food has been suggested, which is based on port capacities, evacuation rates and internal distribution facilities in a manner which avoids congestion at the ports and also permits transport to the interior without recourse to costly innovations. Of this amount, there are approximately 110,000 metric tons available from the spill-over of the current year's programme. As such, 165,000 metric tons of new interim pledges are being sought as advance allocations. Tentatively, advance pledges from Canada, the European Economic

Community (EEC), the United Kingdom and the United States total about 135,000 metric tons; it is expected, therefore, that the advance requirements will be met, although the final needs will be assessed by the multi-donor mission. In addition to the above and pending the recommendations of the mission, \$6 million are needed to place urgent orders early for the purchase of 150 to 200 heavy-duty trucks and to cover their running costs for the 1974/1975 programme.

22. OSRO will continue its main role of acting as a focal point for the United Nations emergency relief operations and providing a monitoring service to bilateral donors. The special conditions of the Sahel, namely four land-locked countries relying on distant ports, vast areas serviced by out-dated railway systems, a poor network of roads, mainly sand-tracks, fragility of the economy caused by the prolonged drought, and lack of resources continue to call for harmonization of external assistance given by donors; OSRO has endeavoured to provide this harmonization and will continue to do so in the coming period. For this purpose additional funds will be required. Up to September 1974, OSRO has received \$US 9,495 million as contributions paid into its Trust Fund of which an amount of \$US 8,065 million has been committed for expenditure in the Sudano-Sahelian countries. These funds have been used for the transport of food grains and other supplies in emergency situations by air, truck, camel, and even by head-load; in addition, the funds were utilized for the provision of vehicles, for subsidies for operational expenses, for additional logistical officers, mechanics and drivers, for the support of selected food-crop production programmes, for seed and insecticides, for health and nutrition programmes, for tarpaulins for storage, and for many other measures to meet emergency situations. OSRO has also provided from its Trust Fund \$US 1 million to WHO and \$US 500,000 to UNICEF. Through the generosity of donors, both large and small, OSRO has been able to fill the gaps when the necessity has arisen.

23. It should be stated that in the emergency relief operations the main role of the United Nations system has been to serve as a catalyst, mobilizing relief supplies and monitoring them to see that outside assistance has reached the countries to match their requirements. The recipient countries have made strenuous efforts to combat the effects of the drought, by unified direction of operations, by strengthening institutional arrangements, by arranging for civil and military transport, by giving priority to the movement of food grains and essential items as against other consumer goods, by permitting the use of transport from neighbouring countries, and by a whole series of measures which have facilitated speedy action. The Governments of coastal countries such as Algeria, Dahomey, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Togo have co-operated in affording priority to the movement of food grains to the affected countries by rail and road and have been helpful in the organization and mobilization of large convoys of trucks. Throughout the operations CILSS has played an important role in co-ordinating policy decisions affecting several countries, in calling meetings of Government representatives and donors, and in guiding over-all strategy.

24. Most of the assistance has been provided bilaterally by a large number of donor Governments and agencies. It is not possible to name all of them, but they have been identified in the progress reports issued by OSRO. Nevertheless, some of the principal donors, such as Belgium, Canada, the European Development Fund (FED),

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France, Germany (Federal Republic of), the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom and the United States, have worked very closely with OSRO and some of them have had their own officers in the countries who helped in the movement of supplies. The non-governmental organizations have played a significant role and some of them, notably those in the United Kingdom, have organized consortiums for meeting the cost of trucks and co-operated with the Government authorities in organizing a ferry at Rosso in Mauritania. The United Nations agencies have continued to work in concert. The World Food Programme officers, both at headquarters and in the field, have worked jointly with OSRO. The United Nations Development Programme resident representatives in the region have borne the brunt of co-ordinating the emergency relief operations on behalf of OSRO, kept a constant watch on the situation, and identified problems for immediate action as they have arisen.

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