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DEPARTMENT of PUBLIC INFORMATION

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Notre Dame, Indiana — The situation in the developing countries contains "all the seeds of violence" and the world is confronted with a race against time to improve the prospects of these countries.

This message was given to students and faculty members of the University of Notre Dame today by Addeke H. Boerma, Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), who is paying a seven day visit to the United States.

Boerma emphasized that he was not trying to be melodramatic. "But," he pointed out, "while many wise and well-intentioned people sit calmly deliberating in their elegant council chambers, pressures are building up in the developing countries which could lead to violence."

The Director General warned against complacency in rich countries over the world food problem. "Now that the threat of famine in India has faded from the front pages of the newspapers; now that we are surrounded by superabundant wheat crops, dairy surpluses and the promise — or threat — of more to come; there seems to be a growing feeling in the richer countries that the world food problem has been liquidated and that they need no longer trouble themselves greatly about the matter.

"Nothing could be further from the truth," he emphasized. At least half of the people in the developing countries are either hungry or malnourished, Boerma said. The reason for their hunger or malnutrition is quite simply that they are very poor.

"It is poverty on quite a different scale from that which exists in affluent societies like the United States," he continued. "In the developing countries poverty is the rule, not the exception. It is the general condition of life for whole peoples — their normal daily surroundings stretching out ahead in time beyond the limits of hope."

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In the two decades between 1965 and 1985, the population of the developing countries — not including mainland China — is likely to increase by two-thirds from 1.5 billion to 2.5 billion. In these same countries nearly 70 per cent of the people depend for their livelihood upon agriculture, which generated more than half their economic activities and accounted for more than 40 per cent of their exports.

"The future of the developing world is thus largely a question of what it can do about its agriculture," Boerma said.

He then gave the major details of FAO's positive approach to the problem in the form of the Indicative World Plan for agricultural development — the result of four years intensive research and investigation — which will be presented to member nations at the organization's 15th conference session in November.

He described the Indicative World Plan as an unprecedented effort to both analyze the main issues which will face world agriculture in the 1970's and early 1980's and to suggest the most effective ways in which they can be resolved at national and international levels.

"The Indicative World Plan estimates that by 1985 the demand for food in the developing countries is going to be almost two and one half times what it was in 1962, and that two-thirds of this increase will be due to population growth alone," the Director General said.

This means that production growth will have to increase 50 per cent faster than previously — an annual increase of about 4 per cent in place of the annual 2.7 per cent increase in the decade up to 1966.

"Now if this fails to materialize, the consequences for the developing countries are going to be extremely unpleasant," Mr. Boerma said. "First the prices of food will rise, and this quite obviously will inflict untold hardship on all but the rich minorities. Secondly, the developing countries will have to import even more food from the wealthier countries than they do at present

But, even more serious, all this will mean that the general economic growth of the developing countries will proceed at a much slower rate than that envisaged in the plan."

Mr. Boerma said he believed it was possible to achieve "this radical increase" of about 4 per cent in developing countries. "But I have no illusions about the immensity and difficulty of the undertaking," he added.

The plan envisages a situation in which about a third of the developing countries' area devoted to cereals would be planted with high-yielding varieties by 1985, compared with about 5 per cent in 1968. This would not only provide sufficient grain for human consumption and for increased livestock feed, but would release land, now primarily devoted to cereal growing, for other crops.

"But if it is to come about, it will require massive investment not only in material inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation, but also in continuous research to adapt and improve the seeds and, broadly speaking, in such things as education for the farmers, logistics and marketing," said Mr Boerma.

One of the major causes of malnutrition is a shortage of proteins, particularly animal protein. "Most people prefer it when they can get it — which means when they can pay for it," said Mr. Boerma.

The Indicative World Plan envisages two phases in tackling the problem. To bridge the immediate gap, it lays emphasis on intensive breeding of animals with a fast reproductive rate such as pigs, where acceptable, and poultry. The huge annual increase in production of between five and ten per cent required can, however, be achieved only through modern methods of factory farming such as exist in the United States.

"Only in the longer run does the Indicative World Plan expect .. ruminant livestock such as cattle and sheep, more productive fishing practices and synthetic proteins to play a significant part in meeting the demand,"

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Mr. Boerma said. "But it does, nevertheless, hold that, if its recommendations are carried out, the projected demand for protein can — ex t in the vital case of milk — be met by 1985."

Turning to the subject of increased foreign exchange, he said that developed countries should allow agricultural exports from the Third World to be more competitive. "This means that they will have to reverse their own drive towards self-sufficiency in many agricultural products and will have to considerably relax their present protectionist policies."

Mr. Boerma also discussed a question which "may well be the most intractable of all" -- rural employment. If the present population growth rates were to continue, he said, by the year 2050 almost 3 billion people would be crushed into the rural areas of Asia alone -- which are already overcrowded with 650 million.

While "agreeing wholeheartedly" with Mr. Robert McNamara -- the president of the World Bank who spoke at Notre Dame in May -- about population planning, Mr. Boerma said that the extent to which population control methods can be successfully applied throughout the developing world was still uncertain.

"I firmly believe that the human race must move without delay to curb its rampant rate of reproduction, but the results, I fear, will not be for tomorrow."

Another solution to the problem is the creation of jobs outside agriculture. But if it is to have any significant impact by 1985 it must involve a rate of investment and growth of gross domestic product much higher than either the most optimistic estimates of the Indicative World Plan or the targets for economic growth rate in the second development decade that are now under consideration.

Most of what can be done over the next decade and a half to meet the employment crisis will have to be done where the crisis exists -- on the land itself. "Undoubtedly the best hope lies in more intensive use of the land," Mr. Boerma said.

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The plan also advocates public works programs that can make use of otherwise wasted resources of human labor in helping to build irrigation works, roads, communications systems, schools, hospitals — "infact, the whole infrastructure so necessary to economic development."

Mr. Boerma also told his audience that, on the basis of the Indicative World Plan the FAO has recently drawn up a new strategy — known as the five areas of concentration — to direct the organization's activities along more effective lines, to help others to channel their efforts in overcoming the world food problem.

The five areas are: filling the protein gap; promotion of high-yielding varieties; mobilization of human resources for rural development; war on waste; earning and saving of foreign exchange.

"The main conclusion which I derive from the Indicative World Plan is that we are in a race against time," Mr. Boerma said. "I would not claim that the plan is complete or perfect. It is the first time, however, that so wide-ranging a study has ever been produced and, whatever else it shows, it shows we have entered a new age — an age in which time can no longer be measured by the leisurely passage of the seasons, but by our ability to deal with the acceleration and the complexity of events."

The plan makes it clear that developing countries will have to make tremendous efforts on their own to solve their problems. "This will require a greater degree of internal stability than has often been the case in the past," he added.

The whole problem ultimately hinges on the shortage of time.

The choice before the world is whether the changes of which he spoke should come about in constructive and peaceful fashion or whether they will be accompanied by violent disorder and upheaval.

"We are now fixing our sights on the year 1985," Mr. Boerma said. "That may seem a little too close for comfort. But in the world as it is today, it is not wise to think in terms of comfort."