

AN EMERGENCY FOOD RELIEF EFFORT

Statement of Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.

President, Notre Dame University and
Chairman of the Board, Overseas Development Council

November 22, 1974

Record food prices, depleted reserve stocks, and a disappointing harvest have raised the immediate spectre of famine for millions. It is already certain that the images of famine in living color will intrude upon our Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. An immediate major global response is urgently needed to halt the epidemic of rising malnutrition and starvation the world now faces.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates the emergency relief needed to prevent famine before next fall to be a minimum of 8 million tons of grain above previously planned aid programs. The U.S. Government estimates the additional food aid need to be 5-6 million tons by June 30. Half the minimum of 8 million tons required must come from the United States; no other single country has the supplies available to provide as much. The other half must come from Canada, Australia, the EEC, Japan and the Soviet Union, and assistance in the financing of these quantities is needed from the capital surplus oil producing countries. Without a strong leadership role by the United States at this point, however, there is no chance that the necessary global program will materialize.

I am today calling upon President Ford to initiate immediately the shipment of 2 million tons of additional U.S. food aid. The United States should also plan to ship another 2 million tons next spring and summer, contingent on matching commitments by other donor countries.

The world's food supply for the coming year is inadequate to meet the global demand, and consumption will therefore be reduced. The stark choice the international community must now address is: Will we act to ensure that the minimum survival needs of the impoverished are met? Or shall price serve as the global rationer, dooming millions to further misery and death?

Providing an additional 4 million tons of food relief in the current crop year will not be easy, but the alternative is not acceptable. The starvation of millions, while an even greater number are eating more than is healthy, will not only be a moral travesty; the spread of famine and misery guarantee a degree of economic and political instability potentially disastrous for all in an interdependent world. Moreover, the failure to muster up the political will to prevent a massive human catastrophe will further undermine the faith of citizens everywhere in the capacity of the world to cope with the problems it now faces. Such an indication that the world's problems had indeed become unmanageable would have dangerous psychological consequences everywhere.

Adding 800 million dollars to the federal budget will obviously be difficult at a time when large budget cuts have already been initiated. There is no escaping the question of priorities. We must ask whether the threat to human security and well-being posed by the food crisis does not outweigh some of the more traditionally recognized security threats--and whether a budgetary adjustment is not appropriate. The entire additional U.S. food aid contribution now required will cost two-thirds as much as one Trident submarine.

Delays in commercial export deliveries in Europe, Japan, Iran, and the USSR can provide one source of additional grain. A selective program to reduce food waste and reduce American consumer demands for grain could be another element in the needed strategy. The anticipated build-up in U.S. rice reserve stocks of 600,000-900,000 tons can also be tapped.

Let me close by reminding us all of what Secretary Kissinger said on behalf of the United States to the world assembled at the World Food Conference in Rome: "President Ford has instructed me to declare on behalf of the United States: We regard our good fortune and strength in the field of food as a global trust. We recognize the responsibilities we bear by virtue of our extraordinary productivity, our advanced technology and our tradition of assistance. That is why we proposed this conference. That is why a Secretary of State is giving this address. The United States will make a major effort to match its capacity to the magnitude of the challenge. We are convinced that the collective response will have an important influence on the nature of the world that our children will inherit. ...and expanded flow of food aid will clearly be necessary. During this fiscal year, the United States will increase its food aid contribution, despite the adverse weather conditions which have affected our crops. The American people have a deep and enduring commitment to help feed the starving and the hungry. We will do everything humanly possible to assure that our future contribution will be responsive to the growing needs."

The time for actions which honor our rhetoric is now. On November 29, according to an arrangement worked out at the World Food Conference, the principal grain exporters and importing shortfall nations will be meeting in Rome. The United States should announce at that time the immediate provision of an additional 2 million tons of food aid and its willingness to provide an

an additional 2 million ton increase in its planned food aid it matched by other donors. If the decision is not made now, the issue may not come to a head again until January, by which time the crisis would be far more difficult to meet.

Many prominent citizens and private organizations join me in pledging our full support to whatever steps President Ford urges upon the American public in order to make more grain available for food this year. Governor Averell Harriman in his telegram of support, which I will read, has provided us with a useful reminder that under even more difficult conditions in 1947 President Truman, in order to meet the food crisis in Europe, called on Americans to conserve 2½ million tons of grain to stave off famine during the winter of 1947. The President called on Americans to take many specific actions to save food including meatless days, saving a slice of bread a day, and closing distilleries for 60 days. Today our total food supply is far greater and Americans consume far more than they did in 1947. The emergency relief now required could be made available without an inflationary impact through far less drastic measures today--if we have the necessary political will and government leadership.

The times call for political leaders who can behave like statesmen, and for informed concerned citizens to make it good politics for them to do so.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

December 9, 1974

Dear Father Hesburgh:

I deeply appreciate your recent letter proposing that the United States provide additional food aid to the hungry peoples of the world. It reflects the compassionate commitment to help the less fortunate abroad which I know you and your associates, indeed all Americans, have maintained over many years. I share that commitment.

Your proposal is made at a time when America faces many difficult decisions and choices if it is to continue to play a responsible leading role in this interdependent world as well as provide for the needs of its own citizens. We must attack both inflation and recession at home and, at the same time, build new relationships with major adversaries abroad. We must also promote peace in the Middle East, improve the world trading and monetary systems, and assist the poorer developing nations. As you know, each of these goals is important, and failure to realize them could adversely affect the lives of many millions of people.

The wise use of our agricultural resources can help significantly in achieving our objectives, but because these resources are particularly limited this year they must be efficiently allocated. I know that you understand my firm commitment to the continuation of food aid despite high food prices and low stocks. My decision on the size of the food aid program will be made after the most careful consideration of needs abroad.

The problems that we face, though formidable, can and will be solved. I am sure of that because of the traditional willingness of the American people to make the necessary sacrifices which you so clearly see. Our confidence, however, contrasts sharply with the despair of people facing starvation. Although I am not now able to give you a final determination on this year's food aid program, I am exploring all means of meeting humanitarian needs abroad and I will make a decision soon.

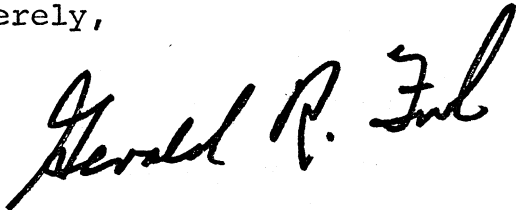
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However, I realize, as you do, that even the maximum effort which the U.S. Government can make in the near future to help feed the hungry will not meet the full need. I hope that more of this total need can be speedily met by other organizations such as churches, community groups and concerned Americans. The multiplicity of private efforts to finance food for the most needy abroad in the next few months can accomplish much.

On the whole, these efforts need not be inflationary if all cooperate; nor would they add to the Federal budgetary pressures that are so evident today. These efforts could involve those most able and willing to contribute to an effective and personal force for assistance to their fellow man at a time of critical need. And, such a cooperative, private effort would be fully consistent with my vision of advancing many local initiatives to help solve today's important problems. I urge you, and all concerned Americans, to do all you can to provide additional help for the less fortunate abroad. I assure you that the U.S. Government will do its part as well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Gerald R. Ford". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

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