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Preparatory Committee of the World
Food Conference
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Draft report of the Preparatory Committee to the Economic and
Social Council on its first session

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REPORT ON PROGRESS BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE, AND
CONSIDERATION OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE CONFERENCE

Comments and views on specific items of the draft provisional agenda for the Conference

15. The specific comments of the Committee on various topics are summarized, for convenience, under the headings proposed in the draft provisional agenda of the Conference.

A. Assessment

Present food situation and dimensions and causes of hunger and malnutrition in the world

16. The Committee agreed that an objective analysis of the present food situation, followed by a review of the present availability and consumption of food by geographical regions, economic classes and vulnerable groups, to the extent possible, would be useful in identifying the causes of emergency food shortage on the one hand, and causes of hunger and malnutrition on the other. This part of the assessment could also include an evaluation of developments in the food situation since 1960, to identify inter alia main difficulties in expanding production in developing countries and in improving conditions of internal national trade in food products.

17. A suggestion was made that causes of hunger and malnutrition should be analysed separately from the present food situation since they had broader economic and social implications.

The magnitude of the food problem in the future and possible approaches to a solution

18. The Committee emphasized the importance of an objective assessment of future world food problems on the lines suggested in the proposed agenda, to provide a realistic basis for more effective national and international action to tackle the problem in the short and medium term but at the same time recognized the inherent limitations of any attempts to look into the future. It therefore cautioned against any over-ambitious or excessively detailed exercise and stressed the need to build the assessment, in view of the shortage of time, around studies that were already available.

19. In this context, some delegates suggested the desirability of confining the assessment to 1980. It was pointed out, however, that it might be necessary to go beyond 1980, since for many subsectors, like fertilizers, a longer time horizon was necessary.

20. It was also suggested that projections should be made on the basis of alternative assumptions about the growth of population, incomes and technological possibilities and account should be taken of the possible fluctuations around likely trends in the production and consumption of food.

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21. Some delegates stressed the importance of distinguishing short-, medium- and longer-term trends and problems. It was also suggested that the assessment should not be confined to basic food-stuffs but shall cover a broader range of commodities necessary for a balanced diet, including fish required for human consumption.

Strengthening world food security through co-ordinated stock-holding, emergency relief and food aid

22. The Committee strongly endorsed the need for strengthening world food security through co-ordinated stock-holding, improved arrangements for emergency food aid and better co-ordinated food aid policies. In this context the Committee emphasized the importance of improving existing arrangements for food information and early warning on food shortages as an important prerequisite for organizing a better world system against unexpected food shortages. Attention was also drawn to the proposals being considered in the FAO for greater international co-operation in the maintenance of adequate food stocks.

23. The Committee emphasized the important role which food aid both bilateral and multilateral could play in alleviating the suffering caused by emergencies, in supplementing nutrition, particularly for vulnerable groups and in promoting development and employment through labour intensive projects and programmes. Some delegates referred to the need to distinguish emergency food aid from the much wider question of disaster relief and pointed out that the Conference would be concerned only with the former.

24. It was pointed out by some delegates that the Assessment under Part A of the agenda was concerned with the short-, medium- and longer-term aspects of the food problem whereas the proposed annotations under Part B were focused only on the medium- and longer-term programmes and policies. In view of the serious nature of the current food problem, the Conference may consider ways and means of tackling the short-term food problems.

International Trade and International Agricultural Adjustment

25. The Committee agreed that the question of food balances and international trade were highly interlinked and that the Conference could usefully discuss specific objectives and programmes in the area of international trade and international agricultural adjustment which have a bearing on the solution of the food problem and which could be carried out after the Conference through existing international machinery. This was particularly important for encouraging agricultural exports from developing countries, for stabilizing food prices on world markets and for achieving greater consistency between national and international agricultural policy within agreed objectives of international agricultural adjustment.

26. While recognizing the importance of certain trade issues in the context of the world food problem, many delegates emphasized the need to identify policies

and measures that could be meaningfully discussed at this Conference and particularly emphasized that the World Food Conference should not duplicate the work of GATT and UNCTAD.

Formulation of conference recommendations

27. The Committee discussed the manner in which the Conference would formulate its proposals and recommendations for consideration by Governments and for follow-up action by the agencies concerned. In this context it was suggested that the Conference might consider the adoption of a Declaration in addition to resolutions on specific topics or issues. It was also suggested that the Conference might distinguish proposals designed to tackle the short-term problems from those geared to the medium and the longer term.
