

SUMMATION OF THE WORK OF THE CONFERENCE BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

THE United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture met to consider the goal of freedom from want in relation to food and agriculture. In its resolutions and its reports the Conference has recognized that freedom from want means a secure, an adequate, and a suitable supply of food for every man.

All men on earth are consumers of food. More than two-thirds of them are also producers of it. These two aspects of gaining subsistence from the soil cannot be separated. Men cannot eat more foods and more healthful foods unless these foods can be obtained from the land or the sea in sufficient quantities. If more and better food is to be available for all people, producers must know what they are called upon to do. They must equally be assured that their labours will earn them an adequate livelihood.

The work of the Conference emphasized the fundamental interdependence of the consumer and the producer. It recognized that the food policy and the agricultural policy of the nations must be considered together: it recommended that a permanent body should be established to deal with the varied problems of food and agriculture, not in isolation but together.

The work of the Conference also showed that the types of food most generally required to improve people's diets and health are in many cases those produced by methods of farming best calculated to maintain the productivity of the soil and to increase and make more stable the returns to agricultural producers. In short, better nutrition means better farming.

The Conference declared that the goal of freedom from want can be reached. It did not, however, seek to conceal the fact that it will first be necessary to win freedom from hunger. In the immediate future the first duty of the United Nations will be to win complete victory in arms; as their armies liberate territories from tyranny their goal will be to bring food for the starving. The need to reach freedom from hunger before seeking freedom from want was understood, and resolutions were adopted on this subject. These covered both the planning of agricultural production and the adoption of measures to prevent violent fluctuations in prices resulting from the shortages of the transition period.

Many delegates informed the Conference about the state of health in their respective countries. It was made clear that there was a close connection between many prevalent diseases and deficiency in diets. It was established that malnutrition was a leading cause for the high level of child mortality. It was apparent that in all countries there are large sections of the population who do not get adequate and suitable food for health; in many countries the majority of the people are in this situation.

The Conference has not attempted to lay down ideal standards of nutrition for all peoples. It has recognized that, while the ultimate objective must be a world in which all people are fed in full accordance with the requirements of good health, it will be necessary as a practical measure to concentrate on intermediate goals which can be progressively raised as conditions improve (Resolution IX). These intermediate goals must differ from region to region according to climate, taste, social habits, and other circumstances. These goals are therefore primarily a matter for individual Governments to determine.

One of the most important recommendations of the Conference is that the Governments and authorities represented should declare to their own people and to one another their intention to secure more and better food for the people (Resolution III). Various measures which might be taken for this purpose were discussed. These included education, special provision for particular classes of the population, and the improvement of the quality of food available (see the report of Section I).*

The Conference recognized (Declaration, para. 3) that a great increase in the production of food would be needed if progress is to be made toward freedom from want. Section II discussed how this increase could be brought about. It was recognized, however, that to a varying extent in different countries and at different times there would be insufficient food of the kind required for health. It might therefore be necessary to take measures to see that special groups of the population, such as young children and pregnant women, who most need these foods, obtain at least their minimum requirements, even if this means reducing the supplies for the rest of the population below what they would otherwise consume (Resolution XXVI).

In Section II the Conference considered how agricultural production could be increased and adapted to yield the supplies most needed by consumers. It began its work with the assumption, which was confirmed by the conclusions of Section I, that more production was needed if the people of the world were to have sufficient food for adequate nutrition and that both new and existing production would have to be adjusted to secure more of those "protective" foods which are most necessary for good health.

Before discussing methods by which these changes could be brought about, the Section examined the short-term position immediately after the liberation of occupied territories. It was generally agreed that this period will be one of shortage, the exact incidence and extent of these shortages being governed by the circumstances in which various territories are liberated from the enemy. During this period the first call will be to reach freedom from hunger in areas devastated by the war. Until these lands themselves are able to produce a harvest, the most urgent demand will be for cereals and other foods which maintain human energy and satisfy hunger.

The Conference agreed (Resolution XIII) that, while shortages lasted, there should be co-ordinated action by Governments both to secure increased production and to prevent speculative and violent fluctuations in prices.

The conditions of shortage existing at the end of hostilities will be exceptional, and it should not be too long before the production of the basic energy foods is sufficiently restored to provide for freedom from hunger. When that state is reached it will be necessary to increase wherever possible the emphasis on production of foods containing first-class protein and other protective qualities necessary to good health, according to the standards considered by Section I of the Conference.

There is danger that the heavy demand for energy foods which will arise from the immediate period of shortage may lead, as the shortages are overcome, to overproduction of these foods unless Governments

* Not printed.