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世界粮食日

一九八一年十月十六日

WORLD FOOD DAY
16 October 1981

**JOURNEE MONDIALE
DE L'ALIMENTATION**
16 Octobre 1981

**DIA MUNDIAL
DE LA ALIMENTACION**
16 Octubre 1981

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**Food and Agriculture
Organization
of the United Nations**

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Poverty Main Cause of Hunger

Always when there is a rise in the price of staple foods and the poor are the first to suffer. Poverty always means a limited choice. When even the simple food of the poor is priced beyond their reach, they face famine.

The drought in Africa and Southeast Asia and the world food crisis of the early 1970s awoke the world to the fact that many developing countries had no food reserves to call on in times of disaster. To provide such a cushion against mass hunger, the International Undertaking on World Food Security was endorsed by the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1973. Countries adhering to the Undertaking pledge "to help ensure a minimum safe level of basic food stocks for the world as a whole in time of crop failures and natural disasters". Eighty-two governments and the European Economic Community have now subscribed to the Undertaking.

A plan of action to implement the International Undertaking was subsequently proposed by FAO in 1979. This encourages nations to build up food stocks and particularly emphasizes regional reserves -- cooperative efforts among several developing countries in the same area.

But not enough is being done to attain such food security. FAO considers that the world should hold about 18 percent of annual cereal consumption in emergency reserves distributed across the world. Speaking to the press in Tokyo in June, Edouard Saouma, Director-General of FAO, warned that during the last two years the world has consumed more cereals than it produces. Consequently, cereal stocks have fallen to 14 percent of annual global consumption and these reserve stocks are dangerously concentrated in the warehouses of a few major producing nations.

Dramatic crises such as earthquakes and other disasters focus world attention on starving populations. For many other millions, however, hunger is a fact of life. Last year, according to the World Bank, there were 780 million people too poor to buy enough food. In an article in *Ceres*, the review on agriculture and development published by FAO, Paul Harrison, an English writer on development problems, probes for the real reason why, in a world which produces enough food for all, there are still many who go hungry. He also sees the answer as distribution -- or rather maldistribution -- based on a variety of inequalities.

"Malnutrition is perhaps the saddest of the many diseases of poverty," he writes. "The poor need food, but they lack the money to buy it or sufficient land to produce it for themselves. They cannot translate their needs into effective demand in the only terms that the market understands: cash".

Harrison says that the problem springs from social injustices, both within and between countries. International inequalities, he says, have

contributed to low incomes in developing countries and to low and uncertain returns to farmers for their export cash crops. Within countries there are inequalities between urban and rural areas, between men and women, and between rich farmers on the one hand and the smallholders, tenants and landless on the other. These inequalities depress food production below its potential, he observes. They are also a major cause of poverty. And in poverty, hunger and disease flourish.

The struggle against global hunger will be given further impetus by discussions, seminars, radio and television broadcasts planned by more than one hundred countries to mark World Food Day, 16 October 1981. These, and other activities scheduled on the anniversary of the foundation of the Food and Agriculture Organization, will help focus world attention more directly on the problem of world hunger and especially on its sources. FAO believes that enough food is an essential human right. World Food Day will be a concrete step toward firmly establishing that right everywhere.
