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TENTH BIENNIAL FRANK L. MCDUGALL MEMORIAL LECTURE

by

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It is an honour for me to be invited to give this tenth lecture commemorating Frank L. McDougall of Australia who did so much to create this wonderful agricultural arm of the United Nations system. While I was not privileged to know him, I am told that inspiration, imagination, and determination best characterize Frank McDougall. We are often told that this planet is woefully short of persons of the McDougall mould but this view is not acceptable to me. Many others, in all parts of the world, have the visions and aspirations of this noble Australian and I hope and pray they also have his determination.

You Ministers, the Secretariat, representatives of other Agencies, can best remember Frank McDougall by stimulating thought on new approaches among your colleagues, by refusing to accept anything but the very best, and by ensuring that whatever we do or propose in this critical field of agriculture has, at its very base, the fullest consideration of the dignity of man and the rights given him by our creator.

America has its roots deep in agriculture. Our greatness, our failures, our joys and our agonies derive in large measure from these roots. Thomas Jefferson was a democrat, a humanist and a farmer. His role in the birth of our country and in the Declaration of Human Rights derives from his agrarian background and philosophy. American farmers played a vital role in expanding our frontiers westward. Their determination, their courage and their individualism rise from their closeness to and love for the land. America's commitment to human rights and individual liberty owes very much to these agricultural pioneers.

Our economic development in the past and our prosperity today are based in large part on our agricultural abundance. While only a tiny fraction of our labour force remains in agriculture, much of industrial production capability and our export potential would not exist without agriculture.

We are very fortunate that the President of the United States is a farmer. His farm was not run by a corporation, it was a family farm. His hands and his feet know well the red dirt and the clay of the state of Georgia. Bob Bergland, our Secretary of Agriculture, is also a farmer, not an agronomist, not a bureaucrat or an agro-business executive, but a farmer elected by other farmers to the Congress of the United States and then appointed Secretary of Agriculture by the President. Much of the hope that I have for this Organization and our relationship to it and the challenge that we have accepted to end world hunger is due to the faith that I have in the farm leadership of our nation.

Our background and our philosophy, our leaders and our people, make the United States a strong supporter of agricultural development. We believe that international cooperation is necessary if the world's problems in food, nutrition and agriculture are ever to be resolved.

But we know full well also that great mistakes can be made in agriculture. Coming from the southern part of the United States, I am painfully aware that the organization of agriculture can be an instrument of repression and human bondage. The colonial system of agriculture in our south was based on cheap slave labour. Even after the Civil War many elements of this system remained. Hatred of the land continues to contribute to the enslavement of my people, for having divorced themselves from the land, they now find themselves in new enslavement in urban America.

Industrialization transformed the south, its labour, its economic structure and its social organization. Industrialization attracted the poor farmers - black and white - off the land where they could barely scratch a living. Industrialization generated a demand for skilled and educated labour. The blacks of our south could no longer be held down to fuel the profits of absentee landlords. They had to become educated, trained, and proud in order to participate in the industrialization process.

The experience of the southern United States has taught us a lesson. Agricultural development can only succeed in the long run if the rights to land and the social organization that support agricultural production and distribution are fair and just.

We must reorient our thinking towards the land and to the needs of those who labour on the land. Farmers need motivation to do their job. The work must pay. The life must be bearable. If people are to find living in the rural areas attractive, then leaders need to adopt policies that make those areas inviting, and see to it that the total rural environment satisfies. The public can push for this. Many Americans believe now that they can best influence national policy by controlling their neighbourhood community. Others are returning to the land, in search of a better way to live.

Our experience has taught us also that many of our urban problems have rural origins; for example, where agriculture is neglected by public officials to the point that people abandon the land and go to the cities to seek a better life. Yet in the cities, life is not necessarily better.

Food is and always has been top-level politics in my country and, I suspect, it has been and is in yours. How many times political leaders would have done better to choose a full granary than a full arsenal, to prevent violence and disruption.

Food and hunger are now very much a part of the international debate between what we call the north and the south. In the past, monarchs, presidents, prime ministers, and generals have risen or fallen with the fluctuations of staple food prices. Hunger knows no homeland; it violates borders, impels migrations, alienates otherwise loyal citizens. Hunger is said to be a problem of the poor, but the hungry poor, in their anger and frustration, can pull down the rich and powerful.

Food is a right. Food is a political right. Our own positions as leaders depend on guaranteeing this right. Many of us began our careers with slim waistlines and good intentions. Now we are part of a privileged group, circling the groaning tables of international diplomacy. It is therefore incumbent on us to stay aware: there is hunger and malnutrition, in my own country, in other lands; it can come upon us swiftly.

I grew up in the tradition of civil rights struggles to affirm popular rights. In the U.S. civil rights movement, we used to ask, "What good is it to have the right to eat at an integrated lunch counter if you can't pay the bill?" We knew we had to desegregate public accommodations: we also knew we had to confront the economic barriers to universal human rights.

What more basic right could there be than the right to food? It underpins all other human rights, for without food there is no humanity, either of body or spirit. Hunger not only saps vitality, it violates human dignity.

Though many of us live with abundance, we are all aware how pervasive hunger is. In the African Sahel even now rainfall and crops are uncertain and the situation grows more ominous daily. In the United States, too, there have been serious droughts in the west and south. Elsewhere, in the midst of natural or political upheavals, farmers do not plant. Although most of the world's granaries are overflowing today, they may not be tomorrow. Even in the midst of plenty, drought and famine are still with us. Experts tell us that a reasonable estimate of the number who are undernourished in our world is five hundred millions. We know that many governments are hard pressed to raise the money to pay for badly needed food imports.

Today, in a period of relative plenty, it is essential to work towards guarantees of the right to food for the world's population. It is time to take stock and plan against future famines.

Billions have gone into food relief in recent years; but relief ends only today's hunger; it does nothing for the long term. The ultimate goal has to be total food security. We have the obligation now to plan preventive measures in both marketing and production that may obviate the emergency sacks of grain and help people devise ways to feed themselves.

Hunger is primarily a problem of the poor and the powerless. The rich somehow manage to get enough to eat. Food is not the only problem of the nomads in the Sahel, the miseries of those sleeping in the overcrowded streets of Calcutta, or of the hungry in Haiti. Poverty is a complex of deprivations, only one of which is hunger. But of all the misfortunes that afflict this planet, surely relief of hunger is the most essential.

Our ancestors were far more at the mercy of natural threats to food production - drought, pestilence, floods and disease - than we need be. We possess many techniques for solving the problems of world hunger and malnutrition. Today hunger need not be inevitable. The world can produce enough food for all, within our lifetime, thanks to the advances throughout the ages, including the plough. Production, however, is only one side of the coin. The other is distribution. Who will produce more and for whose benefit? Why is food distributed so unevenly?

In attacking the problem of hunger and poverty, we need to pay special attention to the rural poor. One way to help the rural poor is to increase their self-sufficiency. There are many rural areas which cannot pay for imported food and whose people live on marginal lands in fragile environments. For a variety of reasons they are unable to grow enough food, draw enough water and plant enough ground cover to subsist. My Chinese friends say, "It is good to give fish to a hungry man. It is better still to help him fish for himself."

Self-reliance, however, is only part of the answer. In food, the world is interdependent. Our common task - to organize this interdependence fairly - is unfinished. Many people feel helpless and angry before the fluctuations of world food prices, the insufficiencies in the present grain reserve pattern, the vagaries of marketing, the difficulties in establishing grain reserves, the scarcity of capital for investment. Even minimal global emergency food reserves fall short of what many consider sufficient. The poor nations expect a genuine reinforced effort from the richer nations.

We must renew domestic efforts to implement the agrarian reforms necessary to feed the poor. Hard political choices have to be made. Let us terminate land tenure policies which result in unfair distribution of the fruits of the land and inefficient production; credit facilities that benefit rich farmers and ignore the small and medium-sized entrepreneurs; pricing policies which deny low-income farmers a fair return on their production or place a disproportionate tax burden on them; distribution policies which impede the free flow of vital foodstuffs from areas of abundance to areas of need, even in the midst of famine; and population policies that fail to ensure couples the right to determine the number and spacing of births.

Obviously each nation should ensure that it is conscientiously following policies designed to help the poor achieve their right to food. However, the community of nations collectively has a responsibility to cooperate to improve the international climate for efficient production and distribution and elimination of hunger and poverty:

By a substantial and effective increase in resources transfer devoted to the problems of hunger and malnutrition:

By an accelerated transfer of technology and knowhow with careful adaptation to local circumstances:

By an improvement in the international market for food, reducing the cycle of scarcity and plenty, of high prices that take food from hungry mouths and low prices that ruin farms financially and destroy their access to credit.

The richer nations have done far less than they might to help their poorer neighbours through resource transfers and technological assistance. Governments are supported by constituencies within their own borders, who often neither know of nor care about problems in other countries. Taxes are always too high, and there is little sentiment for using them on projects whose benefits are at best far away and indirect. Conservation is fine for others, but not if it demands a change in one's own style and patterns of life. Protectionism, subsidization of inefficient production and unfair commercial practices still abound. And yet if poverty in general and the maldistribution of the world's wealth are to be corrected we need the courage and wisdom to accept changes, not because they are easy to accomplish but because we recognize their innate justice.

The food producing and exporting countries have a special obligation - to help organize a more effective and stable market for food, to use their food abundance wisely for the international good, to contribute to an effective international system of food reserves and to disseminate their production knowledge to enhance food security for all.

In spite of all that is done by the agricultural exporting nations, there will still be no true independence and freedom without a well-developed programme of rural development. The task is not just to feed hungry people but to involve them in productive capacities. The problems of urban migration, unemployment, and income distribution that plague all of the nations of the world in some form are only exaggerated by food dependence. Rural development can be a key to both food production and the stabilization of our nations in new development patterns.

In this decade, the development plans of many countries received a rude set-back from the rising oil prices. Many nations experienced hunger. We have given much thought to oil and not enough to agriculture. Treated well, the land is an inexhaustible resource, not a depletable one like oil. Renewing itself every growing season, the land can protect us from the worst terrors of want. It is up to us, in the international community of nations, to behave responsibly, using our resources well and effectively for the good of all.

Rome is called the eternal city. It is also the city of our sustenance. The Food and Agriculture Organization here in Rome has been a vital force for international cooperation in agriculture since 1945. It is deserving of our support and close attention. It is our organization and we have the responsibility to make it an increasingly effective force in world agriculture. The FAO/UN World Food Programme is an increasingly important channel for food aid. The concept of food for work, pioneered by the WFP, can be expanded into one increasingly developmental tool.

Yet if food production is to be a development machine, contributing to an agriculture-based rural development strategy, the entire community of international development agencies must be involved.

The patterns of roads and infrastructure in most of the developing world are part of the colonial pattern of exploitation. They were not designed to help the nationals develop. They are still contributing to the enslavement of the people. If this pattern is to be reversed, then feeder roads developed by UNDP, credit availability structured through IFAD and the World Bank, fertilizer, irrigation and rural industrial development must somehow be done in concert.

Bureaucratic coordination can also be the death of development. We can get so concerned about protecting our bureaucratic vested interests that we never get to the people with the resources they so desperately need. There is a delicate balance between coordination and creative competition that must be found. I think the principal reason I was invited to give this lecture is that the Director-General and I have a certain affinity for this problem, that we both are willing to be controversial if it in some way will shake loose the bureaucratic lethargy and get the job done. Every country in the world is fighting and losing the battle of bureaucracy. Whether East, West, North or South, we find that we are our own worst enemies.

One of the mechanisms which has emerged as a creative challenge to the problems of bureaucracy is the utilization of the volunteer. As a concept to help the agriculturally less developed nations of the world, I like the idea of national, regional, and perhaps even international volunteers for food production. The idea would be to integrate the very best of the volunteer service concept with the best ideas for promoting efficient, low-cost agricultural productivity and technical cooperation among developing countries. Technical efficiency is as important as voluntary service and might best be built in by an emphasis on both human and technical progress.

Volunteers have many strengths: they are dedicated; they are not a new bureaucracy, for they are temporary, but to be effective, they must be well trained.

For technical services, we have within the UN system itself considerable available back-up. Moreover, since self-reliance, not exports, is the goal, village improvement needs to be kept low-cost.

Such a corps of volunteers could serve where the mechanized techniques of expensive farms are ruled out. Even if funds were available, mechanized techniques have their limits, particularly in the fragile environments where many of the people most vulnerable to famine live. There, even small shifts in weather or land use can bring disaster. Massive mechanized intervention can even result in great wastes, like the infamous peanut or groundnut scheme in Tanzania, before independence.

Such a national, regional and international food corps would promote small improvements that reduce problems of excessive or wasteful land use, poor crops or stock varieties, erosion, grass burning, inadequate water supply and deforestation. One part might specialize in the needs of rural women, who account for at least half of the subsistence food production of the developing world. Volunteers must have knowledge not only of different agricultural processes, but also of different societies. Village agricultural development requires great sensitivity to local social relations.

Farming takes time and persistence. As outside volunteers withdraw, and the nationals take over, it is important to maintain technical back-up services for some years. Too many village developments have faded away for lack of technical support during a reasonable transition period. Food volunteers would take on tasks in the context of a national plan, through a process which might include dialogue with capital donors. At the outset if the international, regional and national volunteers train together, this could reinforce the national agricultural, educational, research, and extension services. As many of the outside volunteers as possible should come from the developing countries.

Volunteers would be expected to put their hand to the plough, the pump, the wheel. However, their main charge is stimulating villagers to greater production and self-sufficiency to be a part of a self-perpetuating chain of practical agricultural education.

This idea of food volunteers is conceived as a complement to the existing international development structures. Since any organizational planning must be done collectively, I suggest the concept only in broad outlines; it must of course fit into the existing international system and benefit from existing national services.

In our struggle against hunger and malnutrition, a food corps concept is only a step. Who would not volunteer in such a cause? Of course, this cannot answer all our problems. There is no simple single answer to the problem of food security. Working to develop this concept can refresh our dialogue, give us strength to solve conflicts among ourselves, and renew our dedication to alleviating global hunger.

This year I had the good fortune to travel to several African and Caribbean countries. In Jamaica, I met people who said, "Why should a poor country, with good land, import food?" In Guyana I was impressed by the cooperative villages I visited, and by the towns where authorities gave people land and encouraged farming.

Perhaps the most impressive lessons were those from Costa Rica and Ivory Coast. Both are countries with extremely limited mineral resources, yet their development of the land has been the key to all of their industrial development and social progress.

There are still many problems. However, food self-sufficiency by these countries is the basis not only for an export potential and earnings of foreign exchange, but of a new social development and political freedom. Thus, even in bad times, townsmen who have no jobs can still subsist from their own harvests.

Our backgrounds differ in many ways and we have many different viewpoints. As Julius Nyerere has said "The nations must have the courage to talk about their differences, and must hold fast to the principles of our common humanity".

The basic human need is for a filled bread basket, a bowl of rice, or millet, and for the balancing nutrients of greens, protein, fruit and milk. Our larger objective is to create a global food system, integrated enough to meet everyone's needs for changing conditions of agriculture, and yet producing an absolute increase in the total amount of food so that there is enough to go around. Never before in history have these goals been so attainable and so necessary for the survival of us all. Food security is not just bread for the hungry, it is some guarantee of peace for the world.

The patterns of agricultural and economic cooperation which can produce a sugar agreement or evolve a Common Fund also contribute to an interdependence and mutual understanding which limits the potential for starvation, military destruction and civil strife. There is no task which requires more urgency than "the beating of swords into plough shares and spears into pruning hooks". Cruise missiles and backfire bombers don't offer nearly the national security that comes from a full harvest and well-fed, well-educated and productive farmers. All of our cities are exploding with anxiety and discontent while rural opportunity for peace and prosperity beckons.

We can fulfill these goals in our time. American students have begun to focus on an end to world hunger by 1985. It was the creative power of youth in our country which successfully challenged racism and discrimination in the 60s and ended our involvement in Viet Nam in the 70s. Surely the youth of the world with our help can end world hunger in the 80s.

If that dream can be realized, it is not too visionary to believe that true food security for the peoples and nations of this planet can be a reality by the end of this century.