

# M I S C E L L A N E O U S

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## FREEDOM FROM HUNGER CAMPAIGN

As will be remembered, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), one of the specialized agencies of the United Nations, has launched a "Freedom from Hunger Campaign", which started in 1960 and will last five years, during which time collective action is to be taken everywhere in the world where food supplies are inadequate. On various occasions, the *Revue internationale* has already published information in connection with this campaign and analysed the participation of non-governmental organizations, thus emphasizing the extreme interest of the Red Cross in the success of this humanitarian movement<sup>1</sup>.

Recently, Mr. J. J. G. de Rueda, Mexican Red Cross Delegate in Europe, in one of the ICRC radio broadcasts, once again reminded his listeners of the importance and moral significance of this campaign in the following terms:

*"In my previous talks on the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, instituted by the FAO, which is, I repeat, the specialized agency of the United Nations for Food and Agriculture, I dealt in the first place with the importance of this prime necessity from the Red Cross point of view. It is a fact that sustenance of the body is our first need and the present unequal distribution of foodstuffs is the cause of serious disturbances in human relations, and also, without a doubt, in the physical development of the individual and of the human race in general.*

*It is curious to note the two principal categories of human suffering, on the physical side alone, for which help is forthcoming. Let us take two examples : accidents and illness. In the case of collective accident,*

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<sup>1</sup> See the French editions of July and September 1960 and January 1961.

*this is a spectacular occurrence attended by much publicity which promotes generous response on the part of the general public, who are informed through the medium of the Red Cross. Witness earthquakes, floods, etc. Other cases, for which the United Nations has a specialized agency, the WHO, are those illnesses termed social, epidemic or endemic.*

*Thus the problem of the improvement of the lot of man in the face of suffering is largely met.*

*The lack of food, in other words hunger, is known and recognized by all—despite which, this endemic wrong has not been systematically attacked.*

*It is thanks to Dr. Sen, Director-General of FAO, that a systematic approach to the solution of this world-wide problem is being made, as well as a drive to stir the public conscience.*

*Due acknowledgment must be paid to the value of his initiative, which nobody, as I have pointed out on several occasions in these broadcasts, can ignore or remain indifferent to in the face of the lamentable sight which the world presents in this respect.*

*On a lesser scale, the Battle of Solferino presented a similar situation to Henry Dunant. Despite the fact that everyone knew of the suffering brought about by war, nobody had organized the relief work which we have today in the Red Cross and which has been functioning for over a century.*

*My most earnest wish is that this "Freedom from Hunger Campaign", which is gradually being built up and to which we should all without exception contribute, should have the success in expansion that the Red Cross has known, and that, at the same time, the human conscience should awake in order to improve this inequality in world food distribution. This, in actual fact, should take place through an awareness of conscience, which, although unable to propose an immediate solution, should nevertheless make for quicker progress, thus avoiding new and more serious trouble."*

In order to provide details of the "Freedom from Hunger Campaign" and to illustrate its development, the FAO has published various pamphlets and brochures. ". . . Much lip service is paid to the need for action (against hunger), more often than not without any real notion of the true state of affairs, of what is at stake and what must be done about it." These words are taken

from the preface to *Freedom from Hunger — Outline of a Campaign*, an FFHC brochure published by FAO. They were written by FAO's Director-General, Dr. B. R. Sen, and summarize the thinking which led to the Campaign's creation.

The brochure itself is a comprehensive and practical introduction to the Campaign. It takes up in succeeding chapters "The Problem" "What Can Be Done", "How the Campaign Operates" and "How You Can Help", and it ends with the words "Act now. The need is urgent. The results may decide whether the future will be marked by chaos or welfare." An illustrated section gives glimpses of the ravages of hunger and what is being done to repair them and prevent their recurrence.

A companion Campaign publication is *The Basic Freedom—Freedom from Hunger*. This is a selection from speeches on the Campaign by Dr. Sen spanning the whole period from its conception more than two years ago to its inauguration.

*The Basic Freedom* sets what might be called the over-all philosophy and main guide-lines of the Campaign, but it is also a review of the facts, figures, concrete experiences and technical analyses of hunger and its elimination.

Illustrating *The Basic Freedom* is a striking series of figures, charts and graphs prepared by FAO's Public Information Service and first used with great success at the recent annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

Two important personalities of the English-speaking world have recently assured the Director-General of FAO of their support.<sup>1</sup>

The President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, has already announced that the United States is prepared to contribute \$40 million in food commodities towards an initial reserve of \$100 million, to be administered by FAO and used to relieve hunger and improve nutrition in underdeveloped countries.

Speaking at a White House press conference, President Kennedy said: "I am pleased to announce that the United States has offered concrete support to a broad-scale attack by the United Nations upon world hunger. I have instructed the Food for Peace Director

<sup>1</sup> See FAO News, Rome, June 1961.

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to offer \$40 million in food commodities towards an initial reserve of \$100 million. This will be administered by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. I am informed that other United Nations members will also make similar contributions. The food will then be used to relieve hunger and improve nutrition in underdeveloped countries of the world. Our participation in this project will complement rather than diminish our existing Food for Peace Program."

Earlier, President Kennedy had written to the Director-General to express the full support of the United States Government for the Freedom from Hunger Campaign. President Kennedy's letter read:

*Dear Dr. Sen,*

*I deeply regret that my full schedule prevented me from meeting you during your recent Washington visit. Since, unfortunately, I could not see you as planned, it is gratifying to me that my senior advisors in the Departments of State and Agriculture and my Executive Office had the opportunity to hold discussions with you concerning the FAO's Freedom from Hunger Campaign and our Food for Peace Program.*

*Together with my assurances of full endorsement and support by the United States Government for the FAO's Campaign, I would like to express my personal interest in the success of both these programs, emphasizing our desire to co-operate in every feasible way in the global attack on hunger and malnutrition.*

*I understand that my advisors stressed the close complementary relationship of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign and the Food for Peace Program. We view this as a challenging opportunity to join you in exploring every possible avenue for using our food abundances in striving for freedom from want.*

*I am looking forward to another opportunity to meet you. In the meantime we are proceeding with the establishment of a National Food for Peace Committee which I am requesting to participate actively in your Freedom from Hunger Campaign.*

*Sincerely,*  
*(Signed) John F. Kennedy*

In May, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, visited the FAO Headquarters in Rome. In welcoming the Duke, Dr. B. R. Sen referred to the ideals and work of FAO and to the "eloquent gesture of Your Royal Highness" in support of the Organization through his visit.

After briefly tracing the background and history of FAO, which was established by the United Nations 15 years ago, Dr. Sen said:

"It has not only helped to transfer scientific knowledge and techniques to the less developed countries, but also to focus attention on agriculture as the spearhead of progress in predominantly agricultural economies. If today we see the developing countries giving primacy to agriculture in their national plans, it is in some measure at least due to the efforts and counsel of FAO."

Dr. Sen pointed out that the "unprecedented rate of population growth" tends to offset the progress which is being made in many countries, and that the Freedom from Hunger Campaign launched by FAO seeks to create "public awareness of the nature of the problem which faces us."

The Duke then spoke as follows:

"Every now and then I seem to find myself travelling about the world and often to the remoter regions. I enjoy these journeys very much; the different peoples and cultures, the different scenery and problems and, of course, the inevitable FAO man. It isn't his fault that I usually meet him in his best clothes at a garden party or a reception, but that has never stopped him from telling me with pleasure and enthusiasm about his work.

Having seen some of your activities in the field—or almost in the field—I am delighted to have this chance to pay a visit to the Headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization and to pay a tribute to the splendid work which it is doing for the people and countries who are so greatly in need of help and advice.

Most thinking people realize, if only vaguely, that a great fraction of the world's population is both underfed and badly fed, but it was only when I was preparing a lecture to the Engineering Institutions in London recently that I discovered for myself some of the grim facts.

Over half the population of the world exists on a diet that would quickly reduce the average European to skin and bones. That's

bad enough, but, in addition, the total world population is increasing at such an alarming rate that it makes the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization even more urgent if it is to make any significant impression. The race between the growth of population and the provision of adequate food resources is desperately close.

It is relatively easy to assemble and marshal impressive facts and figures in order to demonstrate the lopsided world food situation, but it is quite another matter to distil the underlying causes of this depressing and dangerous situation. Nevertheless, it is essential to establish the causes if the cure is to be really effective. Hunger is obviously due to lack of food, but this lack of food may be due to any number of reasons, some purely technical and some very human.

Technical know-how can achieve wonders, but only if it is tactfully and thoughtfully integrated with the prevailing local conditions. Change of any kind cannot be entirely painless, but at least care should be taken to prevent it causing disruption or disintegration. This means that the expert must combine a sound technical knowledge with a lively and practical understanding of human nature, if he is to ease the oppression of stagnant tradition. It is a fundamental truth that while people of all races and cultures can agree about the practical and technical things in life, they most emphatically do not agree about customs and prejudices.

I believe that there are people of goodwill all over the world who not only support and endorse the activities of this Organization, but who are also prepared to give their active help. With the inauguration last year of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, you have given them a chance to convert their concern for their less fortunate fellows into well directed action. The British Government have supported the campaign from the start and I am happy to tell you that the British National Committee has been formed with Lord De La Warr as Chairman, and that I have agreed to be Patron of the Campaign in Britain . . . ”

Prince Philip then concluded his speech by mentioning the contribution of Great Britain towards the Freedom from Hunger Campaign:

”I have no doubt at all that it will provide the means for the people of Britain to play a full part in this great co-operative effort

to set free the hungry half of this world who are trapped in the vicious circle of hunger, poverty, ignorance and disease.

Before this campaign has run its course, a great many people will have rendered valuable services to humanity and countless others will be taking their first steps into a new and a fuller life. But in the meantime let us all remember the melancholy saying of the 18th century poet, Thomas Hood:

*Oh God, that bread should be so dear  
And flesh and blood so cheap."*

Finally, we give the concluding remarks in a speech by Dr. B. R. Sen, whose text has appeared in a pamphlet recently published by FAO<sup>1</sup>.

"It was clear from the beginning that nothing less than heroic efforts would be needed if the people of the world were to be provided with food adequate in quality and quantity for a healthy and vigorous life.

We live in a truly exciting age. Science has brought new visions of man's mastery over Nature. But the achievements of science must be matched by the triumph of human dignity. Without that, the ultimate human purpose of science will not be fulfilled. What the world needs most today is not merely a wider exchange of material benefits, essential though it is, but also a conscious dedication to the right of man to grow to his full stature, regardless of the place of his birth, the colour of his skin, or of the faiths and beliefs he might cherish. I invite you to support the Campaign in the name of this human solidarity, without which all our efforts to banish hunger from the world will lose their true meaning and purpose."

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<sup>1</sup> *The Basic Freedom—Freedom from Hunger*, FAO, Rome, 1960.