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THE NEW INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER AND THE
PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Progress report on the right to adequate food as a human right
submitted by Mr. Asbjørn Eide, Special Rapporteur

1. The Economic and Social Council, by its decision 1983/140 of 27 May 1983, entrusted Mr. Asbjørn Eide with the preparation of the right to adequate food as a human right.

2. At its thirty-seventh session the Sub-Commission had before it a progress report (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1984/22 and Add.1-2) consisting of the first five chapters of the study:

- I. The nature of economic, social and cultural rights.
- II. Existing formulations of the right to food in international law.
- III. The food problems - and food entitlement.
- IV. Food systems.
- V. International co-ordination and facilitation.

The remainder of the study is to contain the following additional chapters:

- VI. The normative content of the right to food including the corresponding obligations.
- VII. International supervision of the implementation of obligations flowing from the right to food.
- VIII. Conclusions and recommendations.

Bibliography.

3. The Special Rapporteur has found it desirable to postpone the completion of the study until 1986. The reasons for this are to be found in certain ongoing activities at the international level, the outcome of which should be reported in the final study.

4. At the intergovernmental level, a highly interesting initiative is taken by the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. At the request of the Committee on World Food Security, the Director-General has prepared a draft text on a World Food Security Compact which addresses several of the issues of significance for the present study. The draft Compact, which has been discussed by the FAO Council at its eighty-seventh session, in June 1985, will be further examined and possibly adopted at the FAO Conference in November 1985.

5. The draft World Food Security Compact (FAO CL 87/10-Sup.1) seeks the achievement of the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger. Its purpose is to make the achievement of food security an integral objective of economic and social plans. Action for this purpose should, according to the draft Compact, be aimed at three specific goals: attaining desirable levels of food production, increasing the stability of food supply and ensuring access to food supplies for those in need.

According to the draft Compact, food should not be used to exert political pressure.

6. The draft Compact outlines actions required from Governments as well as non-governmental organizations and individuals. It underlines that Governments carry the primary responsibility for ensuring the food security of their peoples, and for banishing chronic hunger and malnutrition from their territory. They should give this objective an overriding priority.

Governments are further requested to reaffirm their moral, economic and political commitment to co-operation with each other in strengthening global food security.

7. Non-governmental organizations are required to help create a climate of opinion favouring measures for food security to facilitate the efforts of Governments to this end. They are further called on to contribute directly, through operational and other activities, towards building up higher levels of food security in various parts of the third world.

8. The individual is called upon not only to work for her or his own food security and that of her/his family, but also to recognize the sacred responsibility for the food security of those less fortunate than himself.

9. It should be noted that the draft Compact is not cast in binding, legal terms, but is rather intended as a set of moral and political commitments. It will therefore fall short of clarifying the legal obligations flowing from the right to food, a right which is recognized under international human rights law. Nevertheless, the concepts and the approaches chosen in the Compact may become significant in the evolution of obligations required to give reality to the right to food.

10. At the non-governmental level, several significant events have taken place during the last year which taken together contribute to a better understanding and promotion of the right to food.

11. As a result of a multidisciplinary study, the United Nations University, in 1984, published a book containing contributions from several disciplines and with authors from different parts of the world, edited by Asbjørn Eide et al. and entitled The Right to Food as a Human Right.

12. The Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM), in collaboration with the Norwegian Human Rights Project and the Christian Michelsens Institute, organized in Utrecht in June 1984 a conference entitled "The Right to Food: From Soft to Hard Law". This resulted in a book edited by Philip Alston and Katarina Tomasevski, The Right to Food (Martinus Nijhof, 1984).

13. The International Law Association approved in 1984 the creation of a Right to Food Committee, which under the Chairmanship of Asbjørn Eide is investigating the possibilities for an international instrument on the Right to Food. The committee will present its report in 1986.

14. At the World Food Assembly, a non-governmental gathering held in Rome in November 1984, 10 years after the World Food Conference, it was decided to develop links between non-governmental organizations to promote the realization of the right to food as a human right.

15. During the period 27--31 May 1985, a Workshop on Food Security and Nutrition was held in Tanzania, organized by the International Union of Nutrition Sciences and the Institute of Resource Assessment in Tanzania. The workshop dealt among other things with the right to food in relation to food security at the level of households, nations, and the world.

16. The interest in the right to food has therefore substantially increased during the last year. It is desirable to take these and other initiatives into account in drawing up the final report, which will therefore be presented to the Sub-Commission in 1986.

17. For this purpose, there will also be a need to seek further information from Governments, specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies as well as from regional organizations and non-governmental organizations. This should be done partly to update the information obtained in 1984, but mainly in order to clarify steps taken to promote food security and thereby the right to food for all.