

# A POLICY STATEMENT *of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America*

## HUMAN HUNGER AND THE WORLD FOOD CRISIS

Adopted by the Governing Board  
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### I. INTRODUCTION

Today we find ourselves confronted by a world food crisis which is not itself new, but which is of such a new order of magnitude as to challenge all previous professions, policies and practices. The food crisis of the 1970's is forcing us to face squarely and with new intensity such basic questions as these: Can this finite planet continue to produce enough food for an expanding population and increasing consumption by the affluent? Can we free ourselves to evaluate critically the operative systems in Western society? Can we devise economic and political mechanisms which will contribute to more equitable distribution of available food among the people of the earth?

From its beginnings the Christian community, in response to the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, has expressed compassion for hungry people. In recent times the Church has done this through providing millions of dollars for direct feeding, deploying agricultural missionaries, supporting agricultural training and development, and, on some occasions, challenging unjust social and economic systems which condemn people to poverty and hunger.

Yet we dare not claim too much for ourselves. Although "feeding the hungry" has always been an element of our vocation, oftentimes because of our institutional affluence, our role as owner of lands and buildings and institutions, our materialistic mentality and values, and our involvement and identification with social, economic and political establishments, we have lost sight of the Biblical mandate to identify ourselves with the plight of the poor, and to seek bread and justice for all.

As the Governing Board of the National Council of Churches, we invite the constituent communions of this Council, regional and local ecumenical agencies, and concerned persons of every faith to join us in a search for ways to eliminate hunger and its causes from the earth. We, in turn, offer to join in this effort with world-wide ecumenical agencies and humanitarian forces committed to this search.

### II. THE SITUATION

The U. N. world food assessment developed for the World Food Conference in 1974, studies by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and other responsible studies have delineated the nature and dimension of the problem. In briefest summary:

- From a global perspective, there was in 1974 enough food to feed the present world population, at least at minimal levels. Yet, by conservative estimate, in that year nearly a half-billion people were chronically hungry--40 percent of them children. Thousands starved to death.
- Even in the United States, with its enormous productive and distributive capacity, there are about 40 million people who do not have the means to provide themselves with a nutritionally adequate diet.
- World population is increasing by 70 million per year. Although the increase in world food output exceeded world population growth in two decades prior to 1972, experts estimate that with current population growth and food consumption patterns, the shortfall in food production in the developing countries by 1985 will be on the order of 85 million tons annually.
- World grain reserves have dropped to the lowest in twenty years, down from reserves sufficient for 95 days of food consumption in 1971 to less than 30 days reserve in mid-1975.

### III. CAUSES OF THE WORLD FOOD CRISIS

How are we to understand this suddenly visible crisis? What has brought it about? This crisis has both immediate precipitating factors and much deeper root causes.

## A. Precipitating factors

Among the precipitating factors, three are outstanding: weather, political decisions, and soaring inflation. Erratic weather patterns in a wide band across the tropic regions of Africa, South Asia, and Latin America produced prolonged drought in some areas, floods in others. Farther north two bad crop years created shortages in the U. S. S. R. and cut output in the U. S. After two decades of annual increase, world food production declined in 1972 and again in 1974.

In an unprecedented response to its 1972 grain shortage, the U. S. S. R. made the political decision to purchase 28 million tons of wheat on the world market, 18 million tons of it from the U. S. At the same time, the U. S. pursued policies designed to liquidate long-held government stocks of grain. Moreover, in 1973 the U. S. Government paid farmers over \$2 billion to keep 19.5 million acres out of production. The result was a temporary boom for the American farmer: wheat prices climbed 300 percent in a year's time.

But the prices of everything else climbed also. Prices of fertilizer shipped from Western nations increased dramatically in June, 1973. Later that year the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) boosted the price of petroleum. Because of the soaring cost of these two critical inputs needed for increased food production--fertilizer and fuel--developing nations could not afford a sufficient supply of them, and production fell in lands where it was needed most.

## B. Underlying causes

While bad weather, questionable political judgments, and soaring inflation precipitated the current crisis, they did not cause it. Beyond these factors lie more fundamental disorders of which the food crisis is but a symptom.

Chief of these disorders is the sinful behavior of humankind including the denial of human solidarity, greed, and selfishness with which neighbor exploits neighbor, disobedience to God's will and rejection of God's grace. Seldom acknowledged, frequently institutionalized, and occasionally unintended, sin is the root cause of the world food crisis.

### 1. Unjust economic systems, a legacy of colonialism

Much of the acute hunger in the world is concentrated in poor nations which have been dominated for centuries by relatively rich ones. This is no accident. Throughout the colonial era these nations were typically deprived of opportunities to share in the educational, agricultural, and industrial development which characterized their political masters. Today, despite the disappearance of political colonialism from most parts of the world, economic colonialism ("neo-colonialism") persists, fostered among others by our own nation and U. S. -based transnational corporations which, when unregulated by either the U. S. or the host country, tend to cost the development process in both the U. S. and the host country more than they benefit. Moreover, in many developing countries, mili-

tary regimes and wealthy elites, concerned more for the protection of their own interests than for the common good, cooperate with alien neo-colonial powers in resisting the structural changes required for liberation and justice.

Examples of economic arrangements and practices which perpetuate injustice abound. International trade agreements often benefit rich nations at the expense of the poor by providing the rich with access to materials and markets, while denying the poor access to markets for their processed goods. Capital-intensive agricultural systems often prove profitable for wealthy landholders and Western suppliers of technology, and drive landless farm workers into already overcrowded city slums. Foreign economic aid programs are sometimes designed more to benefit the donors than the recipients. Food aid programs often reinforce dependency rather than encourage self-reliance.

There is enough evil in such systems that no single party need be exclusively blamed. But there can be no question that the principal victims of the operation of such systems are the poor, the powerless, the dispossessed. Institutionalized injustice explains more than all other factors combined why half a billion persons suffer from chronic hunger in a world which could have enough food to go around.

### 2. Insufficient food production in developing nations

A principal fruit of colonial and neo-colonial practices has been the distortion or insufficient development of food production in many developing countries. Food production has frequently been distorted through the encouragement by market forces and taxation policies of the cultivation of a single crop for export rather than the balanced production of food for domestic consumption. Capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive systems of agriculture have been introduced, aggravating rather than relieving the plight of the rural poor. The urgent need for land reform and credit reform has been ignored in many places. In many developing nations, industrial development, tourism, and military needs receive a much higher priority than agricultural development.

### 3. Rapid population growth

High rates of population growth, particularly in developing nations, constitute a heavy and growing pressure on natural resources and food supplies. A growing body of evidence suggests that rapid population growth is more a result of poverty than its cause. High birth rates in developing countries represent an understandable, perhaps inevitable, response to poverty and insecurity. In peasant societies children quickly become hands to work in the field, and parents see children as their only means of social security. Short life expectancy, and high infant mortality reinforce pressures to have many children in order that at least a few will survive. The correlation between high birth rates and low income is sufficiently strong to

suggest that population growth is at least in part an expression of the economic disparities among nations.

#### 4. Patterns of consumption among the affluent

Rapid population growth is by no means the sole source of pressure on limited resources. The consumption habits of the affluent also lay heavy demands. As people receive more income, they eat more, especially meat. Per capita consumption of beef in the U. S., for example, more than doubled between 1940 and 1972. Meat consumption in Japan and the U. S. S. R. reflects a comparable though delayed upward progression. In the U. S. the average person's claim on world food resources is nearly five times as great as that of the average Indian. More than half the increase in food output of the 1960's went to affluent countries with 30 percent of the world population, while the rest was spread among the poorer 70 percent of the world.

Unjust social structures, insufficient food production, rapidly expanding population among the poorest of the world's poor, and the inordinate claims on the world's limited resources by the rich are inter-related factors which point to the dimensions of the world's disorder.

#### IV. THEOLOGICAL BASES FOR HOPE

As Christians, the central question we must ask ourselves in this situation is: What does God require and enable us individually and corporately to do? Some of our central affirmations of faith provide at least a partial answer.

God is Creator of all, and loves and cares for all that He has made. Because every person is a creature loved of God, every person has a basic human right to food, a necessity for survival. Because all persons are creatures of God, equally subject to God's grace and claim, all are bound together in inseparable ties of solidarity. Because "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," we must understand ourselves not as masters and owners of the earth and its resources, but as God's stewards and deputies, accountable to God for the exercise of our stewardship.

In his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ has brought to our sinful and selfish humanity the promise and first-fruits of redemption. The Word made flesh in Jesus Christ is good news: God loves us and all humankind. Christ has borne the judgment against sin that sinners may be renewed by God's spirit with faith and love. All evidence of God's judgment can not separate us from the love of God. Yet we grossly misunderstand and fail to grasp God's grace if we imagine that the Sovereign Lord of all overlooks, condones or easily tolerates our indifference to the plight of our neighbors, our greed and selfishness, our systems of injustice and oppression. The Gracious Lover of all is the awesome Judge of all; and the standard by which he judges the nations of the world is the way they deal with the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, the oppressed.

As Holy Spirit, God is at work in history today, re-fashioning lives, tearing down unjust structures, restoring community, engendering faith, hope, and love. God's ways are not our ways; and often we can see no sign of God's presence and activity in our midst. At times, as we contemplate the extent of the human misery due to hunger, the complexity of its causes, and the difficulty of its solution, we are tempted to despair. Yet we trust in God and live by his promises. God has assured us that he both wills and works for the well-being of all persons and nations. It is the work of the Holy Spirit which impels us to take action even when perfect solutions are not apparent. Thus, we engage in the struggle for bread and justice for all in the confidence that God goes before us and that God's cause will prevail.

#### V. GOALS FOR ACTION BY CHRISTIANS

In faithfulness to our understanding of God's good intentions for all peoples, we can set for ourselves no lesser goal than the abolition of hunger from the earth. Movement toward that ultimate goal requires commitment to such immediate and instrumental goals as the following:

A. The transformation of persons and institutions which create and perpetuate strongholds of power and privilege for some at the expense of many, into new personal, social, economic and political environments which are more conducive to justice, liberation, self-development, and a decrease in population growth.

B. The development and implementation of agricultural and other policies at home and abroad which (a) provide incentives to farmers to produce abundantly, using appropriate technology, those crops needed to feed themselves, their communities and the world's population; (b) protect farmers from the harsh economic consequences which market-oriented economies frequently visit upon producers of abundance; (c) move agricultural practices toward greater harmony with the diverse and fragile eco-systems of the planet; and (d) enable all nations to become self-sufficient in the production or securing of food.

C. The simplification of American life-style to one more congruent with the solidarity of humankind and the limitations of the world's resources.

D. The establishment of urgently needed "interim" measures and long-term distributive systems which, recognizing the unique status of food as a commodity essential to survival, assure to every human being access to food as a matter of right.

With such goals in mind, we turn to the more specific responsibilities of Christians and Christian institutions.

#### VI. RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS

A. We call upon all Christians and other persons of humanitarian concern to join in a renewed commitment

to the task of eliminating hunger from the earth. To this end we call for:

1. Re-examination and simplification of personal and family life styles with special attention to ways of reducing consumption and waste of food and other limited resources.
2. Sensitivity to the existence of hunger in our own immediate communities and participation in efforts to correct the conditions which perpetuate that hunger.
3. Increased sharing of our resources with the hungry world through support of church-related and other agencies dedicated to agricultural and human development, to the transformation of unjust systems, and where necessary, to emergency food aid.
4. Joining with other concerned persons in local community, area, and national covenant fellowships dedicated to increasing awareness and sensitivity about the problem of hunger; mutual commitments to life-style simplification; relevant action in specific situations of hunger locally and around the world; and participation in the political processes necessary to influence national policy in directions indicated in later sections of this Statement.

B. In addition, we call upon our constituent communities to join with the NCCCUSA in re-examination of our respective institutional life styles. Included in such review should be church policies and practices in the following crucial areas:

1. The widespread ownership by churches and church institutions of potentially arable land both in the U. S. and abroad. Could much of this land be utilized for food production, for agricultural demonstration purposes, or made available to the landless poor for farming?
2. The re-allocation of church resources. Total assets of U. S. churches are estimated at about \$140 billion. In the face of the world food crisis, are undue proportions of those assets and of annual church income used for such purposes as church building construction and maintenance, furnishings, conferences, conventions, staffing and program duplication?
3. The Church's use of its own economic power. Substantial portions of church-owned investments are in food-related industries and in transnational corporations dealing in food and/or food production supplies and equipment. Have the holders of these church investments been sufficiently inquisitive and critical about the policies and practices of such companies in the use of corporate funds and power?
4. The style of church response to hunger appeals. With all respect for the compassionate response

by the churches to emergency food needs, are the churches responding adequately to the longer-run issues of agricultural development, population stabilization, institutional reform, economic justice, and human empowerment?

Only as we increase our own sensitivity and re-order our personal life styles as well as those of the ecclesiastical institutions to which we belong, can we speak convincingly to the economic and political leadership regarding the over-arching issues of public food policy.

## VII. RECOMMENDED PUBLIC POLICIES

In economic terms, food is a commodity, but it is a unique commodity. Food is the basic necessity of human existence. One of the greatest needs of our time is the development by the world's sovereign states of a mutually-shared world food policy which recognizes and responds to the unique status of food in the lives of nations and peoples.

The United States, as the leading agricultural producer and trader in farm commodities, has a crucial role to play in the implementation of a sound and effective world food policy design. If our nation is responsibly to perform that vital international role, we shall require a much more coherent and humane national food policy than we can claim at present.

The Governing Board calls upon the U. S. Congress and the Administration to move promptly and vigorously to develop, adopt and implement a national food policy which will include among its major components the following objectives:

### A. For the Transformation of Institutions

#### 1. Increased aid for economic and human development

The United States should increase its response to the requests of developing countries for technical assistance and other forms of aid appropriate to their economic and human development needs. In the agricultural field such aid should primarily support appropriate technologies which would benefit small farmers and increase domestic food supplies. Development assistance by the U. S. should take as a realistic target the U. N. 's goal of a .7% of GNP by 1980 as a reasonable contribution of each donor nation to development. U. S. development assistance should be allocated increasingly through international and voluntary agencies and coordinated with the efforts of international institutions.

#### 2. Justice for small farmers and farm workers

In many developing countries oppressive systems of land-holding, credit and taxation severely limit peasants' incentive and productive capacity. Reform of such systems is a key to increasing food production. Although such reforms are ultimately the responsibility of the governments of these nations, the United States can and

should encourage in every legitimate way the transformation of agrarian structures in the interest of justice for the small farmers and landless farm laborers. Moreover, the United States Government should set an example in this matter by pursuing policies to protect the rights and interests of family farmers and farm workers in our country against the encroachment of corporate agribusiness enterprises.

### 3. Family Planning and population stabilization

To the extent that population growth is a by-product of poverty, efforts at population stabilization are doomed to frustration, unless priority is given to changing the economic structures dealing with food production and distribution. The affluent of the world particularly need population stabilization because of the disproportionately heavy drain which they make on the world's resources. With commitment to a priority for economic justice, the U. S. Government should project national policies which work toward population stabilization, while avoiding coercion of the poor and powerless within our society. It should also support the efforts of other nations and of international agencies toward population stabilization within the context of economic development and social justice. To be effective, population stabilization programs must include more than direct techniques and incentives for limiting numbers of births. Far more importantly, they must provide programs to improve job opportunity and income security; reduce infant mortality; up-grade maternal and child health; advance basic education; elevate the status of women; and generally contribute to raising the standard of living and improving the overall quality of life for all people.

### 4. International trade policies

The United States Government should work at the international level to establish trade policies that encourage agricultural production in the less developed countries by removing trade barriers and stabilizing world commodity prices at just levels. At the same time such policies should be enacted as may be necessary to guarantee justice to all food producing groups and nations. Workers and businesses adversely affected by trade policy changes must be protected for a reasonable transition period.

In this connection, it is also necessary that the U. S. Government in collaboration with other national governments and international agencies, move to re-orient the enormous and growing powers of transnational corporations, disciplining their activities in ways which will contribute to the general welfare of humankind.

### 5. Arms limitations and reduction of military spending

The enormous military establishment of the world, which consumes more than \$270 billion annually, is a major competitor with agricultural production for world-scarce natural resources and money. The United States Government should reduce its own military expenditures

and curtail its sale of arms abroad and also press vigorously for international arms control, thereby reducing the inhuman waste of war and war preparedness, and releasing vast funds needed to eradicate hunger through economic development in every nation.

## B. For the Increase of Food Production

### 1. Policies for U. S. food production

A critical part of the solution to the world food crisis lies in increasing production in the developing countries themselves. However, some countries cannot, at least at present, produce enough for all their needs. The U. S., and other major food producing countries, will need to continue to fill that production gap. Production levels in this country should be planned high enough to meet those needs and to maintain buffer stocks to meet emergencies. Such plans should not jeopardize the increasing of production in food-deficit countries nor violate sound ecological principles. Such plans should include continuation of appropriate agricultural research; a domestic farm program which provides reasonable price and income stability to American farmers at levels which constitute an incentive to full production; and a national land use planning program which will protect farm land from diversion to non-agricultural uses.

### 2. Increased production and better distribution of fertilizer

Fertilizer, both chemical and organic, is a key element in increased food production. The United States should encourage increased fertilizer production at home and abroad and should discourage non-food uses of scarce fertilizer. While additional fertilizer can be used even on our already well-fertilized fields, far greater yield increases may be obtained from the same amount of fertilizer when applied to under-fertilized land in developing countries. The U. S. therefore should encourage a sharp increase in the export of fertilizer to these countries on terms they can afford. Research and development on fertilizer production both in the U. S. and abroad should be encouraged. United States technical assistance should be made available for development of fertilizer plants to utilize natural gas currently being flared and wasted from oil wells in OPEC countries. The use of organic forms of fertilizer should be officially encouraged.

### 3. Expansion of agricultural research

We are learning that much of the farm technology which has contributed to the high productivity of U. S. agriculture is not directly applicable to many other parts of the world. Scientific research and technology appropriate to conditions in the developing countries are essential to the expansion of their food production. The U. S. should continue and increase the provision of both financial resources and skilled personnel for the pursuit of such research and technology. To the

maximum extent feasible, this form of assistance should be deployed through international institutions and those of the developing countries.

#### 4. Protection of the environment

Humankind has the capacity and indeed the tendency to abuse, misuse and overuse the earth, the air, and the sea and their resources in violation of the fragile ecological fabric of the planet. The U. S. Government should increase research on ecological problems and should support programs which keep food production practices in harmony with ecosystems.

#### C. For Changing Patterns of Consumption by the Affluent

##### 1. Reduction of Food Waste

In the United States, government and private agencies at all levels should campaign against household, restaurant and institutional waste of food. Energy waste through over-processing, packaging and transporting of foodstuffs should be minimized.

##### 2. Reduction of U. S. food consumption

Medical testimony indicates that nutritional diseases of abundance affect many persons in the U. S. Many are induced to over-consume nutritionally unsound products by advertising and the mass media. Government agencies should mount educational campaigns to encourage more modest and healthful levels of diet and to discourage excessive use of grain-based alcohol beverages. The government should also encourage greater reliance on range feeding in place of grain feeding of livestock.

#### D. For Meeting Immediate Needs

##### 1. Increased food aid

The U. S. should reverse the recent shrinkage in the volume of U. S. food aid in comparison with total U. S. agricultural exports. A reasonable goal for U. S. food aid in our view would be ten percent of such exports each year. (In 1974 the U. S. food aid program represented less than four percent.) Food aid should be used to aid self-reliance and not to perpetuate or increase dependency.

In addition to its own increased commitment, our government should take the lead in pressing for an annual flow of food aid, jointly funded by all affluent nations sufficient to meet the emergency needs of hungry people around the world. To use food or any resource needed to procure food as a political weapon is unconscionable in a hungry world. Food aid allocations should be based on the incidence of hunger without regard to political or ideological considerations.

##### 2. Establishment of an international system of food reserves

Our country must become a major partner in a responsible international system of food reserves and an early warning system to alert the world community to impending famine in any country or region. To this end the U. S. should cooperate fully with the world food reserve and warning system recommendations of the World Food Conference. U. S. food reserves should be administered in accord with an internationally agreed upon plan. The U. S. should assist developing countries technologically and financially to develop storage and transportation systems for food which will minimize spoilage and loss by insects, rodents and other animals.

##### 3. Reform and expansion of U. S. domestic food assistance programs

The urgent and legitimate appeals to meet needs abroad should not obscure the responsibility of the government to assure an adequate diet for every resident of the U. S. and of territories under U. S. jurisdiction. In the short term this calls for expansion of the coverage, liberalization of the provisions, and more adequate implementation of the federal food stamp program and other food aid programs. In the long run, our goal should be a diffusion of economic power and a redistribution of income leading to policies of full employment and income maintenance that will assure every American an adequate level of living.

#### VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we address a word to the people of our nation. In this bicentennial year, we are especially conscious of great advantages enjoyed by our nation--abundance of natural resources, fertility of soil, favorable climate for food production. On this base we have erected an enormously productive agricultural system which has fed the majority of our own people well and made available vast quantities of food for export.

Our record for equitable distribution of this abundance is much less impressive. In the name of the free market system we have allowed corporate interests to become inordinately powerful, and a few persons and corporations to accumulate tremendous wealth and power. Faced with these monopolistic trends, small farmers find survival increasingly difficult and millions of our people exist in poverty and in hunger.

Our role as a nation among the nations of the world often has been one of overbearing power--political, economic, and military. Many of the hungry people and poor nations of the world have so little because we have so much.

We call upon all our people and our national government to join us in examining our attitudes and institutions, and in making those changes which must come if our nation is to make its maximum contributions to the achievement of a world free from poverty and hunger.