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## **AFRICA IS STARVING AND THE UNITED NATIONS SHARES THE BLAME**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Much of Africa is still starving. One year after the Ethiopian catastrophe became international news, images of famished Africans continue to be broadcast to the West. Some experts estimate that one million Ethiopians have died from starvation, while hunger also grips approximately 31 million people in 14 African countries. Rallying to Africa's plight, the world has rushed food, transport, medical supplies, and cash to the suffering countries. Some \$296 million of relief has been sped to Ethiopia from American sources alone in 1984 and 1985.

United Nations agencies, meanwhile, through the U.N.'s Office of Emergency Operations in Africa (OEOA), have been working in cooperation with donor governments, official aid agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and the African countries themselves to provide assistance to the countries most affected by famine. The U.N. has concentrated on obtaining pledges from Western donor governments for cereal and noncereal food aid; transportation for food supplies and additional logistical support; health care; relief survival items; and support for essential water projects. As of August 1985, the U.N. had obtained pledges totalling \$493 million for 20 different African countries.

Yet all this generosity is doing little to resolve Africa's chronic food shortage problems. On this the experts are just about unanimous. And it is widely agreed that, although the current crisis has been triggered by drought, the underlying causes include

the flawed economic policies pursued by the majority of famine-plagued African countries.<sup>1</sup>

For these policies the United Nations must share the blame. In the past quarter century, the U.N. has made the economic development of Africa's newly independent nations a major priority. Between 1980 and 1984 alone, the U.N. spent some \$6 billion on development and humanitarian aid to Africa. Much of this money tragically has been spent on programs that undermine agricultural output. Thus instead of assisting African nations to achieve economic growth, the U.N. has contributed to the deterioration of Africa's agriculture-based economies by promoting and sustaining a philosophy of economic development that encourages government interference in the rural economy and discourages the individual farmer from working hard and taking risks. And when the U.N. did not actively promote such anti-growth programs, it often tolerated--and thereby sanctioned--the ruinous economic policies imposed by many of Africa's post-colonial leaders.

One U.N. agency that has been involved intimately in African development is the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Its five-year (1980-1984) expenditures were \$853.2 million, of which the U.S. share was \$210 million. Edouard Saouma, the Lebanese who has been FAO Director-General since 1975, estimates that the FAO spends half its budget on programs in Africa.<sup>2</sup> In 1982, this amounted to \$132 million for 1,499 field projects in Africa. These included: \$5 million for Ethiopia; \$6.4 million for Libya; \$7.4 million for Mozambique; and \$7.4 million for Tanzania--all countries with failing socialist economic systems.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of promoting free market agricultural policies in these and other African countries, FAO has supported projects with a "government-centered" bias that excludes private sector and market-oriented policies. And the FAO has continued on this bent, despite the overwhelming evidence produced by economists from the World Bank and other organizations that economic growth in such

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1. See U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, "Africa: The Potential for Higher Food Production," Washington, D.C., April 1985, p. 6.

2. Statement by Edouard Saouma, Director-General of the FAO to the Second Committee of the Fortieth Session of the General Assembly, New York, October 28, 1985.

3. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO in Africa, Rome, 1983, pp. 40-41.

developing countries as Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea, and Kenya is strongly correlated with growth in the private sector.<sup>4</sup>

Instead of encouraging basic economic reforms in African countries, FAO promotes the principles of the so-called New International Economic Order. This rejects any notion that developing countries have responsibility for their own growth but demands mandatory transfers of resources and income from the developed nations. Support for this new "order" is part of the FAO development philosophy that holds that developing states have a "right" to development assistance from the West. FAO recently endorsed, for example, a call by its developing nation majority for an abolition of patents on new seed varieties--known as "plant germ plasm"--bred by Western companies and universities.<sup>5</sup> FAO apparently views these new seed varieties as the "Common Heritage of Mankind," and thus backs the notion that any profits from these seeds be distributed to the developing countries where the seeds originated, often centuries ago. What FAO seems to ignore is that, if the possibility of future monetary gain is removed, these Western firms will be less willing to take the risks needed to develop the new seeds.

In addition to sponsoring thousands of development and agricultural projects in Africa during the past decade, the U.N. has created programs to monitor the state of African agriculture, environment, and health. There is, in fact, an FAO early warning system for drought, pestilence, and other agricultural catastrophes. This system has produced hundreds of studies, which, if properly analyzed and publicized, could have lessened greatly the impact of the current African disaster. The FAO first warned of a major food crisis in Ethiopia in December 1982, but the U.N. did not hold its full-scale donors' meeting until March 1985.

The famine in Ethiopia and other sub-Saharan African nations, of course, cannot be blamed on the United Nations alone. The U.N.'s development philosophy largely reflects an ideology and attitude toward foreign aid that is also shared by some Western governments and international organizations. This view insists that economic growth in Africa is mainly the obligation of the industrialized states and that development will be the result of the transfer of resources from these states to the developing world. Disregarded is the evidence from recent U.N. projects in Africa showing that development occurs as African societies are transformed not by outside forces, but from within, and as they gain the "political stability, social mobility,

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4. See Keith Marsden, "Why Asia Boomed and Africa Busted," The Wall Street Journal, June 3, 1985.

5. Philip J. Hills, "Battles Sprout Over Third World Seed Supply," The Washington Post, November 4, 1985, p. A3.

economic incentives and many other socio-economic characteristics prevalent in Western society during its industrialization."<sup>6</sup>

If the U.N. is truly serious about ending Africa's food shortages, then the U.N. must stop advocating policies that almost guarantee such shortages. U.N. agencies should shake themselves loose of well-intentioned but discredited philosophies that entrust government bureaucrats with the main role in economic growth and blame the West for Third World economic problems. The U.N. rather should start encouraging African states to try the policies that have had a successful track record in more than a dozen developing countries; even mainland China's successful new agricultural policies have something to teach the U.N.

If the U.N. continues to ignore these examples, it will continue to share the blame for starvation in Africa. And U.S. taxpayers' dollars going to the FAO and other U.N. development agencies will continue to be wasted.

#### THE U.N. CONCEPT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In terms of money and personnel involved, most of the work of the United Nations is directed into the varied programs aimed at "achieving a better life for all people."<sup>7</sup> During the past 20 years, as developing country membership in the U.N. grew at a rapid pace, the U.N. has expanded its economic and social activities greatly. Between 1980 and 1984, for example, the U.N. spent some \$15 billion--or 75 percent of its total budget--on economic development and humanitarian aid through ten different agencies or programs: International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); United Nations Development Program (UNDP); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); World Health Organization (WHO); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA); United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA); World Food Program (WFP); and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Of this \$15 billion, the U.S. contributed around \$4 billion. The U.S. has been contributing another \$8 billion a year in bilateral humanitarian aid and development assistance to the less developed countries. U.N. officials interviewed by The Heritage Foundation have estimated that between 30 and 40 percent of the U.N.'s development and humanitarian aid funds have been spent on Africa.

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6. Moredechai Kreinin and J. M. Finger, "A Critical Survey of the New International Order," Journal of World Trade, 1981, p. 511.

7. United Nations, Everyone's United Nations, New York, December 1979, p. 117.

One of the hallmarks of the U.N. approach to economic development since 1961 has been its reliance on the proclamation of three separate "Development Decades." The resolutions establishing each of these decades have called upon the industrialized states to increase financial and technical assistance to developing countries and to "improve" commodity arrangements with developing countries. In sum, the developed nations have been asked to assume responsibility for the development of the Third World countries.

In 1984, the Group of 77, which now comprises most of 130 developing countries at the U.N., submitted its review of the Third U.N. Development Decade. The document was laced with imperatives: "donor countries shall take early and effective action for the replenishment of..., all developed countries shall attain the target of..., donor countries shall fulfill their commitments," and so on.<sup>8</sup> This philosophy influences all U.N. development policies and programs, but the Food and Agriculture Organization has put it into practice in its approach to development in Africa.

## THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION

### FAO Budget and Staff

While the FAO is not the largest U.N. development agency, it is one of the most significant in terms of its influence on African development. FAO Director-General Edouard Saouma estimates that the FAO devotes about one-half of its budget to Africa; in 1984, this amounted to \$105 million. The size of the FAO budget increased 68 percent between 1980 and 1984. This rate of growth is almost triple the rate of other U.N. development agencies during the same period, and is exceeded only by the 92 percent increase in the budget of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

As in all U.N. specialized agencies, there is a difference at the FAO between the ordinary, or regular, budget and the extraordinary budget. The ordinary budget is based on assessed contributions by all member countries in accordance with the U.N. scale. The extraordinary budget is based on voluntary contributions by other U.N. institutions and member states. In the FAO's case, these are provided, first and foremost, by the U.N. Development Program for technical assistance. Thus, for example, the regular budget for the FAO in 1982-1983 was \$366.6 million, of which the U.S. contributed \$91.6 million. Yet, in 1982, the FAO also received considerable funding from the UNDP for the development projects--\$447.2 million for projects in Africa alone. Of

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8. Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the International Development Strategy, U.N. Document A/AC.219/L.1, May 10, 1984, pp. 7, 9.

this sum, the U.S. contributed another \$149 million. Under the U.N.'s one-country one-vote system, of course, while ten countries pay over 70 percent of FAO's costs, they have but one vote each in setting policy for the almost 160-member organization. The size of the FAO staff has been difficult to estimate. FAO sources put it at 8,279, but the true figure is thought to be around 9,700.<sup>9</sup>

### Poor Planning and Inadequate Program Evaluation

The FAO is making Africa's food shortages worse. American development experts at the World Bank and the Department of State have told The Heritage Foundation that the FAO is failing to tackle the basic problem of African development: mismanagement of agriculture.

Writing in the London Sunday Times in 1984, respected and experienced U.N. observer Rosemary Righter noted that "in the field, the FAO has become a byword for bad planning, poor coordination and irrelevance to the rural poor."<sup>10</sup> Righter cited an independent critic who claims that, in the FAO, "what is planned doesn't happen...if you take development to mean that a particular project leaves people better able to look after themselves, virtually no FAO program serves development."<sup>11</sup> Sudhir Sen, a former UNDP official, described a United Nations Development Program (UNDP)/FAO project in South Asia, in which the FAO had devoted much effort to "preinvestment activities" rather than to actually furthering development. He writes:

By far the most urgent and obvious need was to inject more science and modern inputs--improved seeds and fertilizers...--to boost per acre productivity. Preinvestment had nothing to do with these pressing tasks. Yet FAO managed to grab 40 percent of the UNDP's allocation and devote it largely to land and water surveys, each extending to about four years and ending with fat reports. A senior FAO aide who was especially adept at promoting these projects became a hero within the agency for successfully procuring so much business.<sup>12</sup>

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9. Rosemary Righter, "U.N. Bureaucracy Makes the Hungry Hungrier," Sunday Times (UK), August 26, 1984.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Sudhir Sen, "Farewell to Foreign Aid: At the United Nations," Worldview, August 1982, p. 7.

Several observers of FAO activities have maintained that many FAO programs lack focus and specific objectives. The U.S. General Accounting Office and others have found that these programs have no substantive evaluation procedures to determine the quantitative benefits or results of project efforts.<sup>13</sup> Even in crop production, where measuring results is possible, FAO claims they are "difficult to quantify." In one FAO assessment, less than half of the joint UNDP/FAO projects were judged to be of good quality.<sup>14</sup>

### Examples of Failed Projects

Questions about projects and programs are not encouraged at FAO. A \$66 million "Technical Cooperation Program," proposed by Director-General Saouma as a tool for quick small-scale action, is shrouded in secrecy.<sup>15</sup>

In a 1971 FAO project for the production of commercial cotton in Southern Nepal, the FAO recommended that the people who were to produce the cotton be settled in "a remote area of virgin forest" miles from any market. After ten years, by which time the costs had doubled to \$3 million, there had been no assessment of the economic effectiveness of the scheme. During the life of the project, the Nepalese farmers increasingly showed that they preferred "alternative crops." Yet the FAO ignored their preference, convinced that "cotton is economically attractive for the country." The only reason the FAO could give for the farmer's reluctance was that there had been no government marketing board to purchase their cotton. The FAO recommended establishment of such a board.<sup>16</sup>

This example illustrates FAO's strong bias favoring government institutions as the primary vehicle for agricultural development. It not only excludes consideration of private sector initiatives, but reinforces the formidable legislative, regulatory, and institutional barriers to agricultural production that plague many less developed countries, particularly in Africa.

There are other examples of the inappropriate nature and lack of planning in the U.N. approach to development in Africa. A New York

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13. Comptroller General of the United States, "The United States Should Play a Greater Role in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations," May 1977.

14. FAO, Review of Field Programs, 1980-81, C81/14, Conference of the FAO, September 1981, Rome.

15. Righter, op. cit.

16. Ibid.

Times reporter recently documented a 1984 trip that he and other journalists made to Mozambique under the auspices of the U.N. Office of Emergency Operations in Africa. The U.N. intended to show off model projects funded by the U.N. Development Program (UNDP) and implemented either through the FAO or another U.N. specialized agency. The reporter described a UNDP/FAO maize grinding project in a small Mozambique village. The key component to the project was an automatic diesel-powered grinder. The machine was there, but had lain idle for three months, waiting for expensive diesel fuel, which had to be imported.<sup>17</sup>

Today, Mozambique requires up to \$568 million a year in hard currency for fuel, spare parts, and other essential products. It earns only about \$110 million a year from exports. The U.N. maize project, like other U.N. schemes shown the reporters, forces Mozambique and other countries, which cannot maintain large foreign exchange surpluses, to import expensive resources in order to keep projects going. Since it also fails to provide export earnings, its effect can only be to add to Mozambique's poverty and dependence on foreign aid.<sup>18</sup> Another failed program:

A \$14 million project in the Sudan, undertaken by the FAO in cooperation with the World Food Program, was designed to provide village wells, roads, and community structures for refugees fleeing civil strife. Because of the government's failure to build the necessary infrastructure, commodities were not delivered. With inadequate milling and storage facilities, the food provided by the World Food Program was eventually distributed to government workers, many of whom sold the food on the black market. Because its targets were abandoned, the project's operations became so general that "any activity could be fitted into them."<sup>19</sup>

A 1982 report by the U.N.'s external auditor at the FAO painted a picture of chaotic bureaucracy, uncontrolled budgets, incompetence, and delays in the organization's programs. The auditor's discoveries included:

o An African project that took four times longer than planned to complete and cost an extra \$200,000, because the man initially appointed to head it was found to be "unsatisfactory" and had to be replaced.

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17. Clifford May, "The Famine Workers," The New York Times Magazine, December 1, 1985, p. 73.

18. Ibid.

19. Food and Agriculture Organization, "Summary Terminal Report," Sudan No. 634, Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programs of the World Food Program, Rome, February 1983.



o In Asia, a \$3 million animal health project was impeded by budget problems and had not fulfilled its major objectives, even after seven years in operation.

o A plan to help an Asian country set up a cotton industry was running half a million dollars over budget, and had achieved only one of its nine designated objectives after a decade of operation.<sup>20</sup>

### Promoting Dependence on Food Aid

More damaging than the deficiencies of the FAO evaluation efforts and program planning is FAO's almost total refusal to question donor country development assistance and the benefits recipient countries derive from it. The FAO simply endorses its members' economic and development policies, effective or not.

One measure, predictably popular with African governments but harmful to their long-term agricultural development, is food aid. At November's 23rd session of the FAO conference in Rome, Director-General Saouma pointed to "food aid" as "one bright spot." He boasted that "for the first time, the target of 10 million tons of cereals set at the World Food Conference in 1974 has been attained and surpassed."<sup>21</sup> Yet this ignores the essential question of whether food aid has increased Africa's chances for long-term economic development. Two influential British economists, P. T. Bauer and B. S. Yamey, recently repeated the arguments, enunciated for some time, that increasing food aid to developing countries can add to their problems. They write:

Aid can relieve immediate shortages. It thereby conceals from the population, at least temporarily, the worst effects of destructive policies. It also suggests external endorsement of the activities of the government, and this confers spurious respectability on the rulers. In these ways, aid keeps governments afloat and enables them to persist in their damaging policies.<sup>22</sup>

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20. Michael Sheridan, Reuters News Agency, December 22, 1982, reprinted in "The Daily American," FAO Dossier 2, April 15, 1983.

21. Statement by the Director-General to the 23rd Session of the FAO Conference, Rome, November 9-28, 1985, p. 12.

22. P. T. Bauer and B. S. Yamey, "Foreign Aid: Rewarding Impoverishment," Commentary, September 1985.

Deaf to this, Sacuma has called for a doubling of food aid by the industrialized countries and has drawn up a list of 24 African countries he describes as "on the brink of starvation."

### The FAO and the U.N. in Ethiopia

The FAO and other U.N. agencies consistently support countries like Ethiopia which impose disastrous anti-free market agricultural policies. The Mengistu Haile Mariam regime in Ethiopia has channeled some 90 percent of agricultural investment into inefficient state farms, which produce only 6 percent of the nation's grain.<sup>23</sup> Since seizing power eleven years ago this regime has persecuted productive groups, particularly in rural areas, forcibly collectivized agriculture, confiscated rural property, and required farmers to accept low payments for their crops from state buying agencies. Is it any wonder that food output in Ethiopia has plummeted and would have done so even without a drought? Yet Ethiopia has not lacked for foreign aid. It received more than \$900 million in bilateral and multilateral assistance between 1979 and 1982, with some \$260 million coming from five different U.N. sources (UNDP, WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR, and IFAD). In 1982, the FAO earmarked \$25.2 million for Ethiopia.<sup>24</sup>

Maurice Williams, Director of the World Food Council, the U.N. body for coordinating "global food policy," argues that "the FAO should be encouraging, even compelling them to develop policies, and to look at the tough options."<sup>25</sup> Looking at "tough options" was not something that the FAO or any other U.N. agency was willing to impose on the Mengistu regime in Addis Ababa. In 1982, for example, the Ethiopians were warned of impending famine by a joint International Labor Organization/U.N. Development Program-sponsored study, directed by Keith Griffin of Oxford University. The study recommended immediate food rationing and a shift in agricultural investment away from state farms to local projects run by local peasant associations. According to Griffin, the Mengistu government rejected the study's findings because it would not tolerate autonomous groups. Both the ILO and UNDP then agreed to suppress the report. The UNDP Resident Representative in Ethiopia during a visit to New York last September assured The Heritage Foundation that he would provide a copy of the report; it has not yet arrived.

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23. Paul Henze, "Ethiopia," Wilson Quarterly, Winter 1984, p. 724. Also see James A. Phillips and Richard D. Fisher, "A Plan for Rescuing Starving Ethiopians," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 400, December 27, 1984.

24. FAO in Africa, op. cit.

25. Quoted in Righter, op. cit.

## The FAO and the New International Economic Order

FAO has accepted the food policies of its members from the less developed countries, particularly those in Africa that have adopted a state-controlled socialist economic model. Since adopting the principles of the New International Economic Order in 1974, the FAO has emphasized the redistribution of global resources and income. In an important 1981 FAO document, "Agriculture: Toward 2000," FAO Director-General Saouma calls for the "reasonable equitable distribution of income and output" through the establishment of a global food system.<sup>26</sup>

FAO's adherence to the principles of the New International Economic Order also means that the FAO is hostile to the free market system and unwilling to recognize the beneficial role that free market agricultural policies have played in countries like Sri Lanka, South Korea, and recently the People's Republic of China. In "Agriculture: Toward 2000" and subsequent FAO documents, the beneficial role of the multinational corporation is ignored completely. While the FAO claims to consider the "individual farmer" the central actor in future production increases, it also believes that the central government should supply the necessary inputs, the access to markets, appropriate prices, and other incentives, which history teaches can be provided only by the market place.<sup>27</sup>

## THE U.N.'S RESPONSE TO THE AFRICAN FAMINE

The U.N. record thus far in coping with the present African famine illustrates some of the limitations of the U.N. system. The basic lesson is that U.N. agencies are at their best when they stick to performing those functions for which they were created, and when staffed by professionals and technicians with a genuine concern for the substance of these functions. Yet the pervasive U.N. sympathy for socialist economic planning and its reluctance to criticize even such severe economic failures as those in Ethiopia and Mozambique have prevented the U.N. from taking the appropriate steps to solve the problems of the African famine.

The Economist Development Report recently observed that the World Food Program, UNICEF, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, and the U.N. Disaster Relief Organization have the job of firemen when disasters occur. Yet here, too, there is a question about the

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26. FAO, "Agriculture: Toward 2000," Rome, 1981.

27. See Georges Fauriol, The Food and Agriculture Organization: A Flawed Strategy in the War Against Hunger (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1984).

effectiveness of the U.N.'s firefighting team. A caution verging on timidity prevents their going in, as the Economist observed, until "all hell has broken loose."<sup>28</sup>

The U.N. knew as early as 1982, for example, that a food crisis was impending in Ethiopia. Yet it was not until spring 1985 that the U.N. system was fully mobilized to act. As a result, the U.N. Office for Emergency Operations in Africa arrived on the scene after many private and governmental agencies were already in operation. Despite its good intentions, professional outlook, and real achievements, the U.N. Office of Emergency Operations in Africa will most likely never play the pivotal role intended for it because of the unresponsiveness of the U.N. system.

#### CONCLUSION

The desperate situation of the agriculture-dependent economies in Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates that sizeable transfers of resources, direct or through multilateral bodies, neither improve the climate for productive international investment nor contribute generally to self-sustaining economic growth. Ironically, such financial transfers and development programs as those of the FAO actually may have kept many African nations from participating in the world economy.<sup>29</sup>

Extensive research by World Bank economist Keith Marsden, among others, has shown that many Sub-Saharan African countries can learn a great deal from the economic success stories of Asia and other countries in Africa. Marsden's research found that:

- o In countries like South Korea and Thailand, as well as Cameroon and Kenya, economic growth was strongly correlated with real growth of domestic credit to the private sector. Economic growth was also positively related to the private sector's share in total domestic credit. This suggested that the private sector used its financial resources more effectively than did government and public enterprises.
- o Economic performance, in general much higher in East Asia, was not linked significantly to financial flows from abroad, which generally have been much higher in Africa.
- o With the exception of Zaire, all countries in the study began the period with active private sectors and domestic financial markets geared to their needs. It was only over the past 20 years that

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28. The Economist Development Report, op. cit., p. 2.

29. Nick Eberstadt, "Famine, Development and Foreign Aid," Commentary, March 1985, p.

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their paths diverged. Private enterprise responded well to opportunities created by appropriate policies, including relatively low taxes. But in most of Africa, state monopolies and massive deficits crowded out private companies. And government control over foreign exchange, investments, prices, and interest rates caused market distortions and rigidities, resulting in inefficient resource utilization overall.<sup>30</sup>

In one sense, today's food crisis in Africa is the harvest of Soviet and socialist policies embraced by African regimes. But it has been perpetuated by the U.N.'s acquiescence in, or even encouragement of, these policies. Many U.N. development projects, particularly those of the Food and Agriculture Organization, do not encourage private sector initiative or self-sustaining growth in low income countries. Indeed, they actually subsidize practices that perpetuate or even generate poverty in certain places. As such, the U.S. should consider diverting its annual \$53 million funding from the FAO to other U.N. and non-U.N. programs, which promote self-sufficiency and free markets in the production of agricultural commodities.

The World Bank, as well as several private U.S. and international volunteer organizations, has begun to discuss the importance of long-range strategies and free market agricultural approaches in ensuring Africa's prosperity.<sup>31</sup> The U.N. must incorporate these lessons into its African programs to bring long-term solutions to African hunger.

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30. Keith Marsden, "Private Enterprise Boosts Growth," unpublished paper, April 1985.

31. See, for example: The World Bank, Toward Sustained Development in Sub-Saharan Africa, Washington, D.C., 1984; and American Council for Voluntary International Action (INTERACTION), "Long-Term Development in Africa: Recommitment to Partnership," September 1985.