

# Food, Famine and the Rome Conference

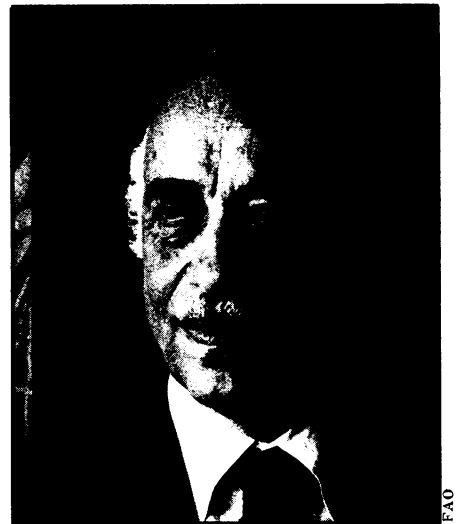
*Science News Science and Society Editor John H. Douglas is in Rome covering the World Food Conference. These are the first of several reports.*

Even before it began, the World Food Conference in Rome threatened to split over politically sensitive issues, while generally accepted strategies—such as the need for more agricultural research and development—were swept along on waves of lip service. With the United States attempting a “low profile” posture, calling on other nations to share the burden of feeding the world’s hungry people, the conference particularly lacked a sense of the leadership that successfully faced the threat of famine following World War II.

The scope of the challenge facing delegates, representing most of the world’s governments, was brought into focus by a report submitted to the conference by an informal group of experts who met just before the first plenary session. Calling itself the “Rome

Forum,” and including such figures as Nobel laureate Norman E. Borlaug, anthropologist Margaret Mead, and former Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman, the group concluded that only unprecedented, unified effort by developed nations could avert catastrophe. The forum, led by British economist Lady Barbara Ward Jackson, called for establishment of a powerful Food Security Council to coordinate emergency aid, and it supported the position adopted by the conference secretariat that long-term investment in world agriculture must be increased from the present level of \$8 billion to \$10 billion per year to something like \$16 billion to \$18 billion per year.

In answer to a question concerning the statement of National Academy of Sciences President Philip Handler that feeding rapidly expanding populations might prove “counterproductive” (SN: 11/2/74, p. 278), Lady Jackson characterized such arguments as “revolting.” Developed nations must quit acting like



Conference Secy. Gen. Sayed A. Marei.

“Victorian duchesses” toward smaller countries and remember that they themselves are the greatest wasters of food, she said. Lester Brown of the Overseas Development Council added that population growth is already slowing in a dozen or so developing countries, and that even more rapid change is on the way.

Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz did not respond directly to the Rome Forum’s challenges, but he did admit the situation has become “critical.” He outlined the American position at the conference in four major points: a

## Kissinger Proposes Major Food Research

In his address this week before the World Food Conference in Rome, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger swept aside the inertia that had enveloped the conference’s opening to present specific major proposals to increase food and agricultural research and provide badly needed foreign exchange to underdeveloped countries. He said President Ford told him to declare, “We regard our good fortune and strength in the field of food as a global trust,” and he showed none of Secretary Earl Butz’s hesitation in calling for food reserves some 60 million tons over current levels.

Regarding scientific research, Kissinger proposed that funding be doubled for the existing eight international food research centers by 1980. During that time, he said, the United States will triple its own contribution for the centers, for agriculture research in developing countries, and for research by American universities on the agricultural problems of developing countries.

Within the United States, he said, advanced research will be increased for a wide range of projects, including efforts to increase protein content of common cereals; to fortify staple foods with inexpensive additives, such as vitamins; to improve plant fixation of atmospheric nitrogen, and to develop new machine tools for the world’s small farmers. Next year, he said, various government departments will test advanced satellite techniques for surveying and forecasting important crops, first in North America and then in other areas of the world.

Finally, Kissinger said President Ford is requesting the National Academy of Sciences to cooperate with other government agencies to design a Food and Nutrition Research Program, to “mobilize America’s talent” in seeking solution to long-term food problems.

In the area of food and health, Kissinger pledged \$5 million to initiate an internationally coordinated program in applied nutritional research, and invited the participation of WHO, FAO, and UNICEF. He also proposed a Global Nutrition Surveillance System, to be administered by the same U.N. organizations. Such a group would pay particular attention to the special needs of mothers and young children.

Kissinger said that certain nutritional diseases could be eradicated just as smallpox and other diseases have been and he proposed an immediate campaign against two of the most prevalent of these diseases: vitamin A blindness and iron-deficiency anemia. The United States is prepared to contribute \$10 million to this effort, he said.

He left open the question of how global reserves should be administered, but proposed three planning groups to be set up to work out the details of this problem and those of trade and investment.

“Now our consciousness is global,” he declared, and called for the elimination of hunger within a decade. Whether the American delegation to the food conference, under Secretary Butz, carries forward with this bold thrust remains to be seen.