

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
20 June 1997

Item 2. Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

1. Several years of economic slowdown, exacerbated by catastrophic floods in 1995 and 1996 seriously destabilised agriculture, further constraining the ability of the country to feed its population. Moreover, economic difficulties have restricted commercial food imports and together these factors have resulted in a dramatic reduction in food consumption.
2. An FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission in May noted that although the Public Distribution System (PDS) had in the past provided a minimum safety net, which prevented the emergence of widespread starvation, the system was now on the verge of collapse with no alternative mechanism available to provide food. In addition stocks with farm households, not covered by the PDS, had also been depleted or were near depletion. Due to the rapid deterioration in food supply, therefore, dietary deficiencies, disease and malnutrition have become chronic and life threatening. In a few households visited by the mission starvation related deaths were reported. The incidence of chronic malnutrition in children, was also reported by UNICEF, whilst there are signs that hospitals are ill-equipped to deal with any escalation in health problems brought on by food and nutrient deficiency. On the whole, the emergence of commonly recognised pre-famine indicators, therefore, suggest that starvation will ensue in segments of the population before the next harvest, unless remedial action is taken urgently.
3. Since the devastating floods in 1995, the UN system has made extensive efforts not only in providing the international community with credible early warnings, but also in mobilizing extensive assistance. The latest Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal made in April this year was for \$126 million to cover needs under three broad categories; food aid (76%), food security, including agricultural rehabilitation and supply of inputs (17%) and health (7%).
4. The following provides a brief summary of developments since the appeal:
 - a. With regard to food supply/assistance, although at the time of the appeal, the government had indicated that imports of up to one million tons of grain could be made commercially in 1996/97, only around 430,000 tons are now anticipated. The main reason for the shortfall is that the government has been unable to reach agreement with commercial suppliers for around 500 000 additional tons.
 - b. The consolidated appeal was for 203 626 tons of emergency food assistance. By the beginning of this month some 72 percent of the appeal had been covered, amounting to approximately \$52 million or 144 460 tons of food.

- c. The appeal also advocated significant bilateral food assistance given the extent of the large grain deficit in the country. The amount of programme and emergency bilateral food assistance (pledged), through various countries and NGOs for 1996/97, currently amounts to some 187 000 tons of various food commodities, mainly cereals.
- d. Irrespective of the interventions so far and the fact that grain for feed and catering uses has been reduced dramatically, the country still has a cereal deficit of around 1.2 million tons for the 1996/97 marketing year ending in October. Of most concern is the period between now and the harvest in September/October as food supplies at various levels have already been exhausted or are near depletion.
- e. In addition to food assistance the consolidated appeal recommended a number of interventions to increase domestic food supply to enhance the country's food security. These included the provision of essential inputs to develop rice, maize and vegetable production, a programme to increase production and diversification in agriculture through double cropping, recovery and rehabilitation of irrigation systems and rehabilitation of flood affected lands. Altogether six agricultural projects were identified, for which donor funding for a total of around \$14 million was requested. To date, only the current double cropping programme has been resourced, whilst the other programmes are yet to receive pledges, though there has been an indication of interest by one donor.
- f. Under the double cropping programme some 37 000 hectares of barley were planted with an expected average yield of one ton per hectare. This year, therefore, gross output of some 37 000 tons is expected. Although this quantity of grain will only cover a small fraction of food needs nationally, the programme offers considerable scope for further development.

5. **In summary, the actions required are:**

- a. In the short term, massive food assistance to meet the gap of 1.2 million tons this year to ensure minimum food needs. There is also urgent need in the short term to provide the country with essential agricultural inputs, especially seeds, fertilizers by the end of June but also fuel, to enhance food security.
- b. In the medium to long term there is need to address underlying problems in the agriculture sector. In this regard, FAO, WFP and IFAD recently concluded that an agriculture sector review be undertaken to formulate appropriate plans for future development. In addition UNDP Pyongyang has strongly indicated that such an

agricultural review and formulation of effective plans, also to address environmental concerns, are vital to stabilise agriculture and food production in the country.

6. In view of the above, the IASC-WG may wish to propose/consider the following options:

- a. ERC to urgently convene a meeting of donors to appraise them of recent developments, the grave humanitarian situation and to urge them to support pending appeals by WFP for food aid and by FAO for fertilizer and other essential inputs to enhance food production.
- b. Review the pending Inter-Agency appeal for humanitarian assistance and ascertain if a modified appeal is needed.
- c. Through dialogue with government, impress the need for strategies to be developed for revamping the economy and approve the proposed sector review to be undertaken by FAO, WFP and IFAD with the assistance of UNDP.