



Church of the Brethren General Board

Resolution on the Use of Food in Foreign Policy

April 22, 1980

Growing out of our New Testament heritage of ministry in service to others (Matthew 25:35, I John 3:17-18), the Church of the Brethren has maintained a commitment to “feeding the hungry, helping the impoverished, healing the broken, and promoting freedom, justice, and reconciliation...” (Annual Conference Statements of 1964, 1974, 1975). This commitment, particularly as related to food and hunger issues, has been actively expressed in programs such as Heifer Project, CROP, Church World Service, and our Emergency Disaster Fund. Many individual Brethren have been involved in food production or distribution and thereby have contributed to meeting the need for food in the US and overseas.

In all our commitments and programs it is clear that we view the production or distribution of food as a response to basic human need. The withholding of food as a method of coercion or retaliation in national foreign policy is inconsistent with our understanding of the proper use of food, and the proper response in terms of conflict, even with those who would be our adversaries (Romans 12:14-21).

Food assistance in times of need can be an important way of promoting reconciliation between nations. Some forms of assistance, even though small and symbolic, can have healing effects which go beyond the immediate physical needs being served. It is not appropriate, however, to sacrifice the needs of people for the sake of symbolic political gestures especially when those gestures foster hostility between the nations involved. When food is withheld it is not usually the national leaders and policy makers who suffer but those who are already the most powerless within nations who pay the price. Therefore, we cannot support the embargo or threat of embargo of US food products to other nations as a means of influencing their foreign policy when the health and food needs of any group of people are at stake.

We call the United States Government to pursue national policies in the distribution of food which serve the needs of hungry people wherever they may be, to never use food as a weapon or “bargaining chip” in foreign policy at the expense of the food needs of people, and to develop food policies which foster self-reliant development around the world and a healthy agricultural system in the United States.

Adopted by the Executive Committee of the General Board of the Church of the Brethren meeting as a committee of the whole on April 22, 1980, Elgin, IL.