March 7, 1946.

Dear Mr. Lehman,

It has been my great pleasure to hear from you since my return to China last year. Equally sincere is my regret for not having been able to write you earlier. But, I have kept you in my kindest remembrance and followed with interest and admiration the splendid services you are rendering to the United Nations in the important task of relief and rehabilitation. I am particularly thankful for your sympathetic and untiring efforts in meeting China’s needs, and I need hardly reassure you that your kind assistance in the cause of friendship and humanity is deeply appreciated by the Chinese Government and people.

Although I have, on account of ill health, relieved myself from executive responsibilities in the Chinese Government, nevertheless, I cannot but feel the deepest concern for the welfare of my countrymen who now witness such widespread suffering as a consequence of the long and bitter war. It is for this reason that I am writing you now regarding the critical food situation in China, confident that you will do your utmost to help our authorities in relieving this war-trodden land.

Despite its fame as a rice-producing country, China is far from being self-sufficient in food supply even in time of peace. Ravages of war and drought have seriously reduced food production in the late years, while seizure by enemy and disruption of transportation have enhanced the difficulties of distribution and supply. Last year China faced a food shortage of no less than 3,260,000 tons and drought was suffered in a number of provinces.

The conclusion of the war has not yet improved the food situation. Manchuria, known for its food production, has not been taken over by the Chinese authorities. Formosa, another rice-producing area normally enjoying export surplus in foodstuffs, found its crop so badly destroyed by the Japanese that our Ministry of Food has had to ship rice to relieve its population.

Meanwhile, weather has not been propitious and, due to bad crops, many districts in China proper are facing acute food shortage, with thousands of people daily being starved to death. The reports coming in are horrible indeed. Although the spring harvest of beans and wheat is only three or four months ahead, the autumn harvest of paddy will not be due until six months later.

To add to China’s difficulties, the British authorities have refused to permit the exportation of rice to China, even on cash basis, from such rice-producing countries
as Siam, Burma, etc., which are normally the foreign sources of supply to China— not even rice saved from daily use by the overseas Chinese in those areas in order to be shipped to their family folks in China.

I have it on the authority of the Minister of Food, Dr. Hsu Kan, that the food situation in China is facing a crisis in the next few months unless immediate relief is forthcoming from the UNRRA. Such a desperate warning will undoubtedly find an echo in the observations of the UNRRA experts on the spot. If you desire detailed facts and figures about the situation, I believe Dr. P. W. Kuo will be able to supply them to you.

Now, I understand that the quota of foodstuffs originally allocated by the UNRRA for shipment to China in the first six months of 1946 has been repeatedly and considerably reduced. Without doubt, such an unfortunate action on the part of the UNRRA must have been a creation of unforeseen circumstances. On the other hand, the food situation in China is really one that requires immediate relief or else there may be all kinds of unrest in this part of the world in the coming months, potent with evil consequences for other parts as well.

Knowing as I do your deep concern in such a critical situation, I venture to appeal to you in the name of humanity, friendship and world rehabilitation that you spare no efforts to assist suffering China in tiding over the crisis by authorizing shipments to this country on the scale originally contemplated. Perhaps through your good offices too, the British authorities may be prevailed upon to permit shipments of rice from Siam, Burma, etc., to China, since I am sure you agree that any surplus supply now available anywhere should be used for immediate relief in the needed areas pending the next harvest.

Please rest assured that the Chinese Government and people will deeply appreciate whatever you can do in this connection, and accept my best wishes for your health and success.

Sincerely yours,

Mr. Herbert H. Lehman, Director-General
United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
Washington, D. C.

U. S. A.