

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman John F. Kerry
Opening Statement For Hearing On Global Hunger and Food Security
April 22, 2010

Chairman Kerry On Global Hunger And Food Security

WASHINGTON, D.C. –Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) today chaired a hearing to explore the steps that Congress and the Administration can take to lessen world hunger and improve food security.

Full text of Chairman Kerry's opening statement as prepared is below:

Thank you all for coming. I'd like to thank Senator Lugar, who has been a passionate and committed advocate for many decades on behalf of the world's hungry. We all appreciate his leadership on this issue. We're pleased to welcome today two officials the leading edge of our efforts to enhance food security, Deputy Secretary Lew and USAID Administrator Shah and an outstanding panel of private witnesses.

We have long viewed global hunger as one of our great moral challenges, and all of us have been moved at one point or another by images of hunger and desperation. Food insecurity also poses a challenge to our broader development efforts and even to our national security. A lack of access to food leads to malnutrition, instability, and even violence. Food riots two years ago in Cairo, Port-au-Prince and other capitals showed how food insecurity can drive conflict. Because as much as seventy percent of the developing world's population is involved in agricultural activities, food security must also be a cornerstone of our development strategy.

And as we gather here on Earth Day, we must recognize that this already urgent challenge is poised to grow in the years ahead as climate change creates new strains on food supplies everywhere.

The Obama administration has taken significant steps forward, including pledging \$3.5 billion over the next three years and establishing the Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative. Last year, this Committee passed the Global Food Security Act, sponsored by Senators Lugar and Casey—which I was pleased to cosponsor—to authorize multi-year assistance to promote food security and rural development.

To address this crucial challenge, we need to reconnect with our decades-long record of success in improving agricultural productivity and feeding the world. We need to use our technology and expertise to help connect farmers with new possibilities and new markets. And alongside our food aid, we need to focus on longer-term efforts designed to empower people and countries to meet their own food needs. That means investing in capacity-building, technical assistance, and improving local governance. And because small investments in women farmers can help feed entire villages, we need to make sure that our food security efforts reach the women who make up 40% of all agricultural workers and a majority of farmers in Africa.

Taking on global food insecurity will benefit our nation's security. We all understand that in Afghanistan, our efforts to help farmers cultivate legitimate crops are crucial to rolling back the poppy cultivation that helps to fund the Taliban. And in Somalia, we have seen the World Food Program forced to cut off aid to much of the country due to threats to its workers and the demands of al-Shabaab, and we have also seen alarming reports of assistance being diverted into the hands of militants and corrupt contractors.

This hearing comes at a moment when our International Affairs Budget is once again being challenged. Even in a tough budget environment, short-changing programs like these will deliver little budget relief at enormous cost to our global efforts, including food security. I am committed to protecting these vital programs.

Dr. Shah, we're pleased to welcome you back to the Committee. One week after Dr. Shah took office as Administrator of the US Agency for International Development, the devastation of Haiti's earthquake presented his agency with one of the most severe humanitarian disasters our Hemisphere has seen. We are all grateful for his efforts and for those of his team. In the days ahead, I plan to join with Senator Lugar and other colleagues to introduce a comprehensive assistance bill that will address Haiti's food insecurity as part of our plan to rebuild better.

We are also pleased to have Deputy Secretary Jack Lew join us today. He's a true expert in the management and resource challenges we face in addressing global hunger and global poverty.

On our second panel, we will hear from two very knowledgeable experts. Catherine Bertini served as Executive Director of the World Food Program from 1992-2002. In 2003, she was awarded the World Food Prize for her efforts to combat hunger. She recently co-chaired a Chicago Council on Global Affairs report on "Renewing American Leadership in the Fight Against Global Hunger and Poverty" with Daniel Glickman, Secretary of Agriculture from 1995-2001 and Congressman from Kansas' 4th Congressional District for 18 years before that.

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