

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman Richard Lugar
Opening Statement for
Hearing on Child Hunger
September 26, 2006

This morning, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee meets to examine the issue of global child hunger and malnutrition. In recent years, the Committee has held hearings on global nutrition issues and the intersection of hunger and the HIV/AIDS crisis. These inquiries have underscored that societies and nations that experience high levels of hunger and malnutrition rarely function well. Consistent nutrition is an essential component of long-term economic growth and geopolitical stability.

We also have reaffirmed that the most basic act of human charity is feeding a hungry person. It is my belief that the United States should extend such assistance wherever possible, both because we have a moral responsibility to do so and because our security and prosperity depend on what happens overseas. We are extremely fortunate to be one of the great food producers in human history. We are also fortunate that we have many creative and compassionate leaders, some of whom are with us today, who have applied their talents to addressing world hunger, often in the face of desperate circumstances.

Tragically, many people around the world continue to face hunger and malnutrition. An estimated 850 million people go hungry, and most of them are among the world's poorest. For the estimated one billion people around the world living on less than \$1 per day, obtaining adequate nutrition is a challenge under normal circumstances. When this population faces a crisis that intensifies food insecurity, such as the locusts that devastated crops in West Africa two years ago, the drought in Malawi last year, or the genocidal violence in Darfur, obtaining sufficient nutrition is nearly impossible. As we discussed in a 2004 hearing, the AIDS pandemic is decimating the agricultural sector in sub-Saharan Africa. As a result, the rate of malnutrition is actually increasing on the African continent. This is a sobering trend, given the science and technology at our disposal in the 21st Century, and it must be reversed.

Although famine and starvation are the most severe and visible forms of hunger, poor nutrition, which often goes unnoticed, can also be deadly. Often, malnutrition is caused not by scarce food supplies, but by poor sanitation and disease. Even adequately fed people can become malnourished if their bodies are afflicted with diarrhea or parasites. In addition, gender inequities, the lack of nutritional education, and certain cultural practices have led to malnutrition in some regions of the world.

Hunger and malnutrition are especially devastating to young children. An estimated five to six million children die each year from infections and diseases caused by malnutrition. Nearly one-third of the children in the developing world are underweight or have had their growth stunted. Even before birth, malnutrition impacts a child's development. We know that the children of malnourished mothers often suffer irreversible physical and cognitive damage.

Hunger and malnutrition also perpetuate poverty and undermine economic growth, development, and political stability in the developing world. Malnutrition often causes poor performance in school, which in turn leads to an overall loss in an individual's productivity. If this situation is common among a nation's youth, it becomes very difficult to make economic advances based on education.

Nations understood the critical link between malnutrition and poverty when they pledged in 2000 to meet the Millennium Development Goals, the first of which is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Specifically, these goals call on the world community to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. The primary measurement for this goal is the percentage of children younger than five who are underweight. Achieving the first goal goes hand-in-hand with the fourth Millennium Development Goal, which is to reduce by two-thirds the child mortality rate in the developing world.

As Chairman of this Committee and a former Chairman of the Agriculture Committee, I have advocated nutrition programs for the poor and for children in our country and abroad. I am hopeful that, as a result of our testimony today, we will better understand the causes of hunger and malnutrition in children and the impact these conditions have on individual health and the advancement of developing societies. Most importantly, we hope to learn about new initiatives to address this problem.

We are pleased to be joined today by a stellar panel of experts who are on the front lines of the fight against hunger. We welcome Mr. James Kunder, Acting Deputy Administrator for USAID; Dr. Julie Gerberding, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Mr. James Morris, Executive Director of the World Food Program; Ms. Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF; and Ambassador George Ward, World Vision's Senior Vice President for International Programs. Each panelist will discuss his or her organization's efforts to combat child hunger and malnutrition, and comment on new initiatives to address this problem.

We thank our witnesses for being here and look forward to an enlightening discussion.

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