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Lugar: Overcoming hunger should be a starting point for U.S. foreign policy

U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Dick Lugar made the following statement at today's hearing on global food security. In a Wall Street Journal oped today, Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner and Gates Foundation Co-chair Bill Gates endorsed the Lugar-Casey Global Food Security Act (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704133804575197860283185140.html>). More information on the Lugar-Casey bill is available at <http://lugar.senate.gov/food/legislation/>.

I join with Chairman Kerry in welcoming our witnesses today. Deputy Secretary Lew and Administrator Shah keenly understand the role that alleviating hunger and poverty plays for U.S. national security and global stability. I look forward to their presentation of the Administration's Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative.

I also welcome Dan Glickman and Catherine Bertini, who will testify on the second panel. Through their work with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and other endeavors, they have elevated our understanding of the causes and consequences of hunger, and have made valuable recommendations to policy makers in the Executive and Legislative branches.

We live in a world where more than one billion people suffer from chronic food insecurity – a figure that has increased by nearly 100 million people since Senator Casey and I introduced legislation just last year. An estimated 25,000 people die each day from malnutrition-related causes. Experts advise us that chronic hunger leads to decreased child survival, impaired cognitive and physical development of children, and weaker immune system function, including resistance to HIV/AIDS.

These grave humanitarian consequences are sufficient cause for us to strengthen our approach to global food security. But we have an even bigger problem. A dangerous confluence of factors threatens to severely limit food production in some regions as the world's population continues to expand. Between 1970 and 1990, global aggregate farm yield rose by an average of 2 percent each year. Since 1990, however, aggregate farm yield has risen by an annual average of just 1.1 percent. These trends threaten the fundamental welfare of a large share of the world's population.

Here are the basic parameters of the problem:

- First, the world's population is projected to increase to about 9.2 billion people by 2050. Growing affluence in China, India, and elsewhere is increasing demand for resource-intensive meat and dairy products. As a consequence, it is estimated that the world's farmers will have to double their output by 2050.
- Second, food security is closely tied to volatile energy costs. Farming is an energy intensive business, and energy price spikes in the future may hit with even greater ferocity than the spike in 2007 and 2008.
- Third, water scarcity will worsen in response to population growth, urbanization, land use pressures, and the effects of climate change. There could be 4 billion people who suffer from chronic water shortages by 2050.
- Fourth, climate change is challenging farmers on every continent to deal with altered weather patterns, novel agricultural pests, and new water conditions.

Despite these alarming trends, investments in agriculture have tumbled since the 1980s. In 2007, rich countries devoted a mere four percent of their foreign assistance to agriculture. In Africa, which has severe food problems, donor aid to the farm sector plunged from \$4.1 billion in 1989 to just \$1.9 billion in 2006. Africa's per capita production of corn, its most important staple crop, has dropped by 14 percent since 1980.

Equally troubling are sharp cutbacks in research into new technologies, farming techniques, and seed varieties that could increase yields, cope with changing climate conditions, battle new pests and diseases, and make food more nutritious. Trade policy of both developed and developing countries has too often focused on protecting domestic farmers, rather than creating well-functioning global markets.

These trends have troubling implications for national security and global stability. Hungry people are desperate people and desperation can sow the seeds of radicalism. Without action, the frequency and intensity of food riots may increase. We almost certainly will have to contend with mass migration and intensifying health issues stemming from malnutrition. Our diplomatic efforts to maintain peace will be far more difficult wherever food shortages contribute to extremism and conflict. Our hopes for economic development in poor countries will continually be frustrated if populations are unable to feed themselves. In short, overcoming hunger should be one of the starting points for U.S. foreign policy.

With these factors in mind, Senator Bob Casey and I introduced the Global Food Security Act of 2009. We believe the bill has served as a practical starting point for the Administration's initiative and as a rallying point for those who agree that food security should play a much larger role in our national security strategy.

The bill would make long-range agricultural productivity and rural development a top development priority. The Lugar-Casey bill, which was passed by the Foreign Relations Committee on May 13, 2009, is the product of extensive study involving numerous foreign country visits and consultations with agriculture and development experts.

Over the course of the last year, the Administration, under Secretary Clinton's leadership, has undertaken its own intensive study of food security. As we have compared notes with Administration officials, it has become clear that the Secretary's Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative has reached many of the same conclusions as we reached on the most efficient ways to expand food production and address hunger. Both the Lugar-Casey bill and the Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative focus on increasing agricultural productivity and incomes, promoting research and technology, being attentive to the special role of women farmers, and emphasizing the nutritional needs of children. Both initiatives would construct partnerships with host country governments, indigenous organizations, institutions of higher learning, and the private sector.

I am particularly pleased that discussions with the State Department have progressed so that we will soon be able to unveil a bill that represents a consensus among the Administration, House and Senate sponsors, and non-governmental partners.

As a farmer who has seen agricultural yields more than triple during my lifetime on my family's farm in Marion County, Indiana, I have faith that human ingenuity can avert a Malthusian disaster. But we need to focus resources for innovations to take root, and we have to apply all the agricultural tools at our disposal. Some take positions that effectively deny African countries advanced biotechnologies that could dramatically improve farm yield. Such positions fail to grasp the enormity of the global hunger threat or the difficulty of doubling global farm yield in the next four decades despite the complications that could result from water shortages, climate change, and many other unpredictable factors. We should partner with nations in research pursuits based on their own country-led strategies; we should neither dictate, nor withhold, technological innovations from which they could benefit.

I believe the food security challenge is an opportunity for the United States. We are the indisputable leader in agricultural technology. A more focused effort on our part to join with other nations to increase yields, create economic opportunities for the rural poor, and broaden agricultural knowledge could strengthen relationships around the world and open up a new era in U.S. diplomacy. I thank the Chairman for holding this hearing and look forward to the discussion with our witnesses.

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