



# **ACTION TO ADDRESS WORLD HUNGER**

**STATEMENT OF  
DR. JOACHIM VON BRAUN  
DIRECTOR GENERAL  
INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE (IFPRI)**

**Prepared for Presentation to  
The Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate**

**February 25, 2003**

Mr. Chairman, it is an honor and a privilege to be able to testify before the Committee today. It is also gratifying that the Committee is turning its attention to the problem of world hunger. I truly appreciate the efforts that you, Mr. Chairman, along with the other members of the Committee, have undertaken over the years to address this pressing problem.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, at least 50 million people in 36 countries are in urgent need today of food and other **humanitarian assistance**. Some 38 million people, about 75 percent of those currently in need, live in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the deadly combination of drought, protracted conflict, and a raging epidemic of HIV/AIDS has created a catastrophe.

However, Mr. Chairman, I wish to emphasize that these severe emergency needs, which the international community has a moral obligation to meet, are but the tip of the iceberg of world hunger. Today, **840 million people, nearly 15 percent of humanity, live in food insecurity**, meaning that they do not have assured access to the food they need for active and healthy lives. Ninety-five percent of these people live in developing countries, mainly in the rural areas. The figure includes 170 million malnourished children under the age of five in the developing world – one of every three developing-country preschoolers. Unless their nutrition improves today, right now, some five million of them will die this year, next year, and in the years to come. Those who make it to their fifth birthdays are unlikely to achieve their full mental and physical development. They will grow into adulthood as less productive workers, at high cost to their societies, and will most likely have children of their own who are malnourished and poor.

Also, I must stress that it is inadequate to define hunger only as lack of access to a diet with sufficient calories. Our notion of what “hunger” is needs to be broadened, to include the **devastating micronutrient deficiencies**: 2 billion people suffer anemia, due mainly to iron deficient diets, including 56 percent of pregnant developing country women. They have a 23 percent greater risk of maternal mortality than non-anemic mothers. Their babies are more likely

to have low birth weights and die as newborns. Anemic preschoolers face impaired health and development and limited learning capacity. Even when iron deficiency does not progress to anemia, it can reduce work performance in all age groups. Vitamin A deficiency is the leading cause of preventable blindness in children and raises the risk of disease and death from severe infections. It affects 100-140 million children, mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. One-quarter to half a million children go blind each year, and half of them die within 12 months of losing their sight. Pregnant women with vitamin A deficiency face increased risk of mortality and mother-to-child HIV transmission.

Hunger diminishes all of us. Think of the writers, artists, scientists, entrepreneurs, farmers, and workers we lose needlessly to hunger! The international community has repeatedly made pledges to do something about it. At the 1996 World Food Summit, the high-level representatives of 186 countries, including many heads of state and government, agreed to take concerted action to reduce the number of people living in food insecurity to half the current level by no later than the year 2015. The 2000 Millennium Summit and last year's World Food Summit: five years later reaffirmed this solemn goal.

I regret to inform you, Mr. Chairman, that **the world is not on track** to make good on these pledges. Indeed, during the decade of the 1990s, the number of food-insecure people in the developing world decreased by just 2 percent, or barely 2.5 million per year. If China is excluded, the number actually *increased* by over 50 million people. In contrast, between 1970 and 1990, the number of food insecure people dropped by 15 percent, meaning an average annual decline of 7 million people, despite a faster rate of population growth than at present.

I am not here today to be the voice of doom and gloom. There is much that we can do to turn this situation around. In fact, the knowledge base for promising action has much improved.

Mr. Chairman, last year, my organization, the International Food Policy Research Institute, produced a document entitled *Achieving Sustainable Food Security for All by 2020*. I

am pleased to provide the Committee and staff with handouts based on this document, and would be delighted to submit the full document for the record if you would like.

In my statement today, Mr. Chairman, I want to highlight some of the key points for a strategy to reduce hunger, then I want to turn to the specific question of what the United States can do to help end the scourge of hunger and malnutrition. Food aid, in which the United States has long been a global leader in terms of both tonnage and program innovation, is an important part of the answer to that question. However, I also want to touch on the broader areas of development cooperation and trade policy.

The causes of hunger are complex, and include violent conflict, environmental factors (such as natural resource degradation, increasing water scarcity, and climatic change), and discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, age, and other factors. The fundamental cause of hunger, however, is poverty: people are hungry because they cannot afford to buy all the food they need, and they lack the land and other resources necessary to produce food for themselves.

In view of the complex causes of hunger, an equally diverse set of actions is needed for success. If we are to make progress in reducing hunger, **action is needed in seven key areas.**

First, we need to **invest in human resources**: access to health, education, clean water, and safe sanitation for all. Our research at IFPRI has found that educating girls, as well as boys, has a huge impact. Improvements in female education accounted for over 40 percent of the decline in child malnutrition levels between 1970 and 1995. Effective social safety nets are needed in order to permit poor rural households to grow out of subsistence farming.

Second, given the rural center of gravity of poverty and hunger, **broad-based agricultural and rural development** is essential for further food security. It not only boosts the incomes of rural poor people, but spurs growth economy-wide in low-income countries where much of the workforce is concentrated in agriculture. Our research has found that in Sub-Saharan

Africa, each new dollar of agricultural income means up to \$2.60 in total income as demand for goods and services increases in rural areas. This helps to create income-earning opportunities in urban areas that will allow people to meet their needs for food and other necessities. Let me stress, Mr. Chairman, that developing agriculture is not a zero sum game. Our research has found that agriculture-led growth in developing countries stimulates demand for imported agricultural products. Supporting agricultural development is a win-win proposition.

Third, investments in human resources and assuring poor people access to productive resources and employment will only contribute to reductions in hunger and poverty if poor people also have **access to well-functioning and well-integrated markets**; infrastructure such as roads, storage, and water facilities; and supporting institutions. This needed investment in infrastructure is essential to connect poor people to markets.

Fourth, it is essential to **expand research, knowledge, and technology** that is relevant to solving the problems of poor farmers and consumers in developing countries. New developments in molecular biology and information and communications technology hold great promise for advancing food security. The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) is at the forefront of this and I take this opportunity to thank the U.S. government for its continued support of this research consortium. New opportunities to select and breed crops with high micronutrient content to address the Vitamin A and iron deficiencies have been initiated by my institute and currently new alliances with public and private partners are formed under this program of biofortification.

Fifth, we need to improve the **management of the natural resource** base upon which agriculture and food security depend, including land, water, trees, and biodiversity. Otherwise hunger will affect future generations. When poor farmers have secure ownership or use rights, they are more likely to engage in sustainable management practices.

Sixth, the current round of **global agricultural trade negotiations** must result in a fair set of rules for poor countries. At present, developed countries, including the United States and the European Union, provide trade-distorting subsidies to their own agricultural sectors, impose tariff barriers to developing country exports that escalate with the value of the product, and, particularly in the case of the European Union members, subsidize their exports. Let me add, Mr. Chairman, that I very much appreciate your efforts during your tenure as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to eliminate these distortions. The United States should work with other industrialized countries to reform global agricultural trade in ways that will benefit everyone.

We often hear the slogan, “trade, not aid.” In fact, however, trade alone cannot raise developing countries out of poverty. Sufficient levels of development assistance from the wealthy countries are absolutely vital if we are to accelerate progress against hunger. In this regard, I am pleased that the United States and several other donor countries have taken steps to reverse the precipitous declines in aid levels that occurred during the late 1990s.

Seventh, and probably most importantly, **good governance, including the rule of law, transparency, the elimination of corruption, sound public administration, and respect and protection for human rights**, is essential to achieve food security for all. The lack of progress in reducing world hunger in the past decade much relates to increased numbers of ethno-political conflicts and wars. Governance failures, hunger and war are in a complex relationship. In 1999 we identified Afghanistan on our world map of nutrition as the worst nourished country in the world. This was before world attention was drawn to that country by the war on terrorism. The political and security dimensions of hunger require renewed attention. Appealing to so-called political will is not sufficient. Investing in democracy building and empowerment of hungry people, by strengthening their rights, is fundamental to overcoming hunger.

In this context I very much welcome President Bush’s establishment of the **Millennium Challenge Account** as a means to increase the availability of development assistance. I also

commend the Administration for basing eligibility on both level of need and criteria relating to good governance and commitment to poverty reduction. Given what I have said previously, you will not be surprised to know that I believe that there should be a much stronger emphasis in the Millennium Challenge Account program **on agriculture and rural development**. Countries that do not sufficiently allocate resources to rural development and agriculture have their development strategy wrong. In this regard, Mr. Chairman, let me remind the Committee that, in real terms, development assistance to agriculture and rural development today is at lower levels than in the mid-1980s, and represents a smaller share of total aid. Given the crucial need for such aid, I urge the United States to work with other donors to make this area a major development priority.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to join my colleagues on this panel in saying a few words about **food aid**. Food aid is critical to address emergency situations such as that in Southern Africa right now. The United States historically has taken the lead in providing assistance, both through private voluntary organizations and through the World Food Program. The United States must continue to play this role, and I hope that the Committee will press for additional resources beyond those provided in the recent appropriations bill for the current fiscal year. The needs are tremendous.

I would also like to say a bit about food **aid as a development resource**. U.S. private voluntary organizations have a proven track record in making use of food aid both for feeding programs and, through monetization of the commodities, a wide variety of additional development activities. The World Food Program likewise has many years experience in making food aid work as a development tool. I would like to draw your attention to four areas in which food aid can help advance food security: food for education, food for child nutrition, food for work, and food for market development. These uses of food aid directly support three of the seven priority action areas I have identified: investment in human resources, access to productive resources and employment, and development of markets and supporting infrastructure.

Our organization has recently completed evaluations of **food for education** programs in Mexico and Bangladesh. These are not traditional school lunch or breakfast programs, such as those carried out under the Global Food for Education Initiative, but rather involve providing food directly to poor families who agree to send their children to school. We have found that such programs result in increased enrollments for boys and girls alike, without any substantial reduction in school performance. The programs also boost household food security and nutrition among beneficiaries. While such programs need not utilize external food aid, it may often be an important component, as in Bangladesh.

Second, **food for child nutrition** has often proved to be an effective component of integrated child survival efforts. In India, the Integrated Child Development Services use food aid commodities for supplemental and therapeutic feeding to complement a variety of health services.

Third, food aid can support reconstruction efforts following war and/or natural disasters through **food for work programs**. In order that these efforts boost purchasing power and not undermine local producers, it is important that wages be paid in a mix of cash and food. The World Food Program and the PVOs have had many years of experience in carrying out effective programs of this kind.

Lastly, **food aid for market development** can support the local processing and marketing of food products. IFPRI is currently carrying out research on such programs. These may involve direct processing and marketing of food aid commodities or their monetization, with the resources then used to further local processing and marketing activities. We believe that food aid can have a lasting development benefit when it is used in this manner.

Mr. Chairman, I would note that in all the examples I have provided, food aid commodities might be procured locally or from a neighboring country, as well as from a donor country. There are some advantages to the first two approaches in terms of developing regional

trading links and reducing transportation costs. Fostering regional prosperity and stability in this way will benefit the United States in the long run. The third procurement mechanism, which is most commonly used here in the United States, has the obvious advantage of directly benefiting the U.S. farm sector as well as developing countries. It is important that external food aid be provided in a manner and with timing that does **not undermine local food production**, given its importance to food security and poverty reduction. I urge the Committee to continue its effective oversight of U.S. food aid programs to assure that they are compatible with local agricultural and rural development. As I have repeatedly stressed, agriculture in the developing countries is key to winning the struggle against hunger.

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee, I thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.