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NCR Editorial: 'The time is right to end world hunger'

by NCR Staff

Editorial

'No social system, ideology or principle of justice can tolerate a world in which the spiritual and physical potential of hundreds of millions is stunted from elemental hunger or inadequate nutrition. Let us make global cooperation in food a model for our response to other challenges of an interdependent world: energy, inflation, population, protection of the environment. Let us agree that the scale and severity of the task require a collaborative effort unprecedented in history.'

Did Mother Teresa say that, or Desmond Tutu? Maybe Martin Luther King Jr.? No, it was Henry Kissinger speaking in 1974 at the World Food Summit, 35 years and seven administrations ago. Four food summits have passed since then, as well.

'The difference between then and now is that today we can end global hunger,' said Catholic Relief Services head Ken Hackett at the International Food Aid Conference in Kansas City, Mo. 'We know how. We know what's involved, and how much it's going to cost. The question is: Do we have the will?'

A coalition of 29 food aid agencies, including Catholic Relief Services, met for seven months and devised a comprehensive plan to end world hunger. 'It's the most unified effort to rally around specific, concrete solutions I've ever seen,' Hackett said. Legislation is being drafted in Congress now to promote some of its recommendations.

Meanwhile, President Obama has demonstrated a strong commitment to fight global hunger, pledging nearly \$500 million for immediate assistance to Africa and Latin America and doubling financial support for agricultural development to \$1 billion in 2010. This is not charity, the president pointed out, but an investment in future markets and drivers of world economic growth.

More than 1 billion people are struggling now with hunger, according to the United Nations. Every day,

almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes, according to Bread for the World.

The United States, with its resources and knowledge, can assert strong leadership. We must summon the same sense of alarm and resolve sparked by the global financial crisis and channel it into addressing the world's hunger crisis.

In 2003 President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief was launched. This plan was a good example of what the government together with American private voluntary organizations can accomplish. It literally keeps alive millions of people living with HIV and AIDS in Africa.

Return to Food Aid story.

"Our vision must be broad, comprehensive and flexible," Hackett said.

For example, excessive reliance on food aid is not helpful for long-term food security. What's needed is vigorous agricultural development.

The skull-faced specter of hunger perennially stalks the African continent. Seventy percent of its population lives in rural areas, dependent on local farming for both food and economic development. Most African farmers, surprisingly, are women. What's needed for a sustainable success there is targeted technical assistance — as simple as providing cell phones so these women can access market information and learn when to sell and when to store their crops until prices improve.

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"The time is right, the stars are properly aligned and the United States is well-positioned to assert leadership given our knowledge and resources," said U.S. Department of Agriculture senior official Patricia Sheikh at the conference.

We can end the world hunger problem and establish sustainable global food security in our lifetime. Each one of us can contribute by pressuring our elected officials to make global hunger a priority. One way to do this is to join the **Catholic Relief Services Advocacy Network Group**.

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