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The war on hunger is one we need to fight this World Food Day

by Tony Magliano

Making a Difference

This is one war we need to fight. Without our intervention, countless people will suffer, and thousands of children will continue to die daily. The name of this enemy, which deserves nothing less than total annihilation, is world hunger.

Every year around this time -- Oct. 16 -- World Food Day reminds us to pay attention to the multitude of people who suffer from not having enough nutritious food to maintain health and happiness.

The hunger statistics are overwhelming.

According to the World Food Programme, 870 million people are hungry. That's greater than the populations of the United States, Canada and the European Union combined.

Every day, approximately 16,000 children die because they are too poor to live. Malnutrition and hunger-related diseases claim their short lives.

Iodine deficiency is the greatest single cause of mental retardation and brain damage, affecting 1.9 billion people worldwide. It can very easily be prevented by adding iodine to salt.

According to the Christian anti-poverty advocacy organization Bread for the World, more than 48 million Americans -- including 16.2 million children -- live in households that struggle to put enough food on the table. More than one in five children is at risk of hunger. And among Latinos and African-Americans, almost one in three children is at risk of hunger. Persons living in these homes frequently skip meals, eat too little or sometimes eat nothing all day.

In 1979, Blessed Pope John Paul II attempted to awaken our consciences with these words from his New York City homily: "The poor of the United States and of the world are your brothers and sisters in Christ. Never be content to leave them just the crumbs of the feast. Take of your substance, and not just of your abundance, in order to help them. Treat them like guests at your family table."

But how well is our government and we individually measuring up to this challenge?

The U.S. shamefully ranks last among the 22 industrialized countries in percentage of national income allotted for poverty-focused foreign assistance. Only 0.5 percent of the federal budget goes to help the world's poor. Tiny Denmark contributes approximately twice as much of its income.

To make matters worse, Congress is poised to cut from the 2013 federal budget billions of additional dollars in aid to the poor.

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Everything from WIC -- an important food supplemental program that aids poor women, infants and children in the U.S. -- to life-saving international poverty-focus assistance is again on the congressional chopping block.

St. Ambrose warned, "You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. ... The world is given to all, and not only to the rich."

Let's strongly remind Congress that "The world is given to all, and not only to the rich." Please email and call your congressperson and two U.S. senators urging them to significantly increase, not decrease, poverty-focused domestic and international assistance. The Capitol switchboard can be reached at 202-224-3121.

And kindly consider making as generous a gift as possible to Catholic Relief Services, P.O. Box 17090, Baltimore, MD 21203-7090. Please earmark your check for hunger relief. Donations can also be made online at crs.org or by phone at 1-877-435-7277.

Blessed Pope John Paul II emphatically proclaimed that war is always a defeat for humanity. But he would surely agree that winning the war on hunger would be a victory for humanity.

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