

Opening statement by Chairman Dick Lugar at Hearing on Hunger February 25, 2003

“In recent weeks, this committee has considered significant public policy issues including weapons of mass destruction on the Korean Peninsula, and reconstruction in Afghanistan and post-war Iraq. It is appropriate today that we review global hunger issues, which in addition to obvious humanitarian aspects, ultimately bear on security interests of other countries and our own.

“For many Americans, global hunger issues are “out of sight” and consequently often “out of mind”. The intersection of hunger and HIV/AIDS issues in parts of Africa are destroying fundamentals of governments in addition to massive loss of life. The North Korean government makes judgments on who among the elderly, children and pregnant women will receive food through the world food program. With Secretary Powell’s reference this past weekend to ongoing provision of food assistance to the north, it is clear that hunger issues stand in significance along side nuclear issues on the Korean Peninsula.

“I would like to express heart-felt gratitude to the outstanding collection of witnesses present to provide “The State of the World Report on Hunger.”

“According to the Agency for International Development (A.I.D), overall trends in food and nutrition have shown a steady improvement over the last 40 years. Per capita caloric intake has risen worldwide. People are living longer and healthier.

“However, many countries remain mired in poverty, many have experienced decline in per capita incomes. A variety of factors contribute to this reality. As already stated, the leaders in some countries have implemented policies tantamount to selective starvation for segments of their population. Other countries are plagued with corruption and inept bureaucracies. The scourge of HIV/AIDS is having an especially significant effect in reversing gains in certain countries and deepening poverty in others.

“Today’s hearing is timely, given the food aid review recently conducted by the Bush Administration. Overall assistance provided by the United States throughout the years has been substantial. It is essential that we review the need, assess our response and formulate wise and efficient policy for the future. According to the World Food Program, over 24,000 persons die daily from hunger and related causes.

“Our first panel features James Morris, Executive Director of the WFP and Andrew Natsios, Administrator of the Agency for International Development. The second panel includes Ellen Levinson, a food aid specialist who works with a consortium of private voluntary organizations; Ken Hackett, Executive Director of Catholic Relief Services; and Dr. Joachim von Braun, Director General of the International Food Policy Research Institute. While the first four panelists will report on the global hunger scene and alert us to the challenges of an effective response, Dr. von Braun has been asked to assist the committee in thinking through new or enhanced global hunger relief strategies. Before asking Jim Morris to commence his testimony, let me call on Senator Biden for his comments.”

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