



# *Congressman Donald Payne*

## Tenth District - New Jersey

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### Payne Calls for a More Effective Food Aid Program

Yesterday, Congressman Donald M. Payne, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, convened the hearing, "International Food Aid Programs: Options to Enhance Effectiveness" to assess the status of the United States food aid program.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), there are currently 842 million people in the world who suffer from chronic hunger – of which 824 million live in developing countries. To be chronically hungry means that an individual's daily caloric intake is insufficient for them to live active and healthy lives. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of people chronically hungry stands at a staggering 206 million – which accounts for roughly one-third of the region's population and one-fourth of the total number of the world's hungry.

The effects of chronic hunger can be costly and devastating. According to the FAO, the direct medical costs in developing countries attributed to child and maternal undernutrition totals approximately \$30 billion per year. Far more profound are the indirect costs of undernutrition. Chronically hungry individuals suffer from increased illness and death, reduced cognitive ability, and decreased productivity and lifetime earnings which ratchet the indirect costs into the hundreds of billions.

Some African countries have experienced significant progress. For example, in Ethiopia, the number of chronically hungry, from 1993 – 2003, declined by 16%. In that same timeframe, the number of chronically hungry in Ghana decreased from 5.8 million to 2.4 million. During the hearing Payne stated, "While some countries have seen some advances, overall progress has been slow. If we are to reach the UN Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger, then we must redouble our efforts."

The movement towards food security has been hampered by many factors including poverty, poor governance, conflict, water scarcity and climate change. However, the aim of the hearing was to evaluate where there is room for improvement in the United States' food aid program. One area that can have a significant effect on the amount of food aid that reaches those in need is the local/regional purchase of food commodities. Proposed by the Bush Administration, the ability to purchase food commodities closer to its final destination can drastically reduce the cost of business and transportation and the time it takes for the food to reach those in need. Also, increased US investment in long-term agricultural development programs such as building professional linkages between US land grant colleges and developing nations can produce considerable dividends for long-term food security.

"As we debate the 2007 Farm Bill and other pieces of legislation that can affect international food security, I will collaborate with other committees and Members of Congress to ensure that we create policies that will have the biggest benefit to the most people. We must ensure that each of the tools we are using to improve food security is operating at maximum efficiency," Payne concluded.

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