

Senator John F. Kerry

“Alleviating Global Hunger: Challenges and Opportunities for U.S. Leadership”

March 24, 2009

Opening Statement

We are here to consider one of the great moral challenges the world faces today: the persistence of global hunger. It is remarkable that in 2009, there are over 850 million hungry people in the world. One in seven people on Earth goes hungry every day. We must do more to alleviate this crisis and the suffering it causes.

While other threats often command our attention, hunger and malnutrition remain the number one risk to health worldwide—a risk that will be exacerbated by two relatively new driving forces in today’s world: the global financial crisis and global climate change. We are already having a harder time feeding people, and our challenge is only growing.

The reality is that we have a long way to go to achieve the very first Millennium Development Goal, which is to cut in half by 2015 the proportion of people in the developing world who suffer from hunger. In Africa, things have actually gone backward. One in three people are malnourished, and food security today is worse than it was in 1970. Conflict, poor governance, and HIV/AIDS have all reduced basic access to food. Now drought—aggravated by climate change—makes the situation even more desperate.

This is important: We must begin to deal with the growing impact that global climate change will have on our struggle against hunger. A recent study in *Science* warns that as much as half the world’s population could face serious food shortages by the end of this century—a burden that will largely be borne by those who have done the least to bring about climate change. Last year’s food riots were a worrisome sign of how a crisis in food security can quickly become a national security issue.

The global financial crisis, too, poses an urgent and immediate threat. The World Bank estimates that as a result of this crisis an additional 65 million people will fall below the \$2 per day poverty line this year, and an additional 53 million will fall below the absolute poverty level of \$1.25 per day. If food prices spike in the next few months, we risk a double-edged calamity in which farmers in poor countries can’t afford to plant, and buyers can’t afford to purchase food. We need to think about this issue now so that we can prevent the next crisis instead of dealing with its consequences.

One of the special challenges of a truly global crisis is that, at the very moment when our assistance is most critical to the developing world, we are under the greatest strain to turn inward and cut our overseas aid budget. To ensure that we are doing our part to feed the world, we must take the long view and resist the urge to abdicate our responsibility as an economic and moral leader. Our foreign assistance budget directly impacts the number of people we can help to feed. Moreover, nothing will do more over the long run to address global hunger than fighting poverty. That is why we must demonstrate our commitment by fully funding the President’s international affairs budget and initiating a foreign aid reform process that will make our interventions more

effective and efficient. I intend to look closely at introducing authorization legislation to ensure that we have a strong, effective aid program that can tackle the key challenges of our day.

It's a pleasure to be here with my friend and colleague, Senator Lugar, who has shown so much leadership on this issue. He recently introduced, along with Senator Casey, a food security bill authorizing new resources to fund agricultural development and alleviate poverty. I commend Senator Lugar and look forward to working with him on this important legislation.

While we need to be ambitious, we cannot tackle hunger alone. We must engage in a multilateral approach and work in coordination with international institutions including the World Food Program, international aid organizations and the World Bank.

Today, we are fortunate to be able to hear from two very knowledgeable panels of experts. Catherine Bertini served as Executive Director of the World Food Program from 1992-2002. In 2003, she was awarded the World Food Prize for her efforts to combat hunger. She recently co-chaired a Chicago Council on Global Affairs report on "Renewing American Leadership in the Fight Against Global Hunger and Poverty" with Daniel Glickman, Secretary of Agriculture from 1995-2001 and Congressman from Kansas' 4th Congressional District for 18 years before that. Reverend David Beckmann is President of Bread for the World, the leading Christian poverty and hunger reduction advocacy group. Dr. Robert Paarlberg is a professor at Wellesley College and a world-renowned expert on agriculture, particularly in Africa.

On our second panel, we will hear from two respected scientists on the subject of food security. Dr. Edwin C. Price, Associate Vice Chancellor and Director of the Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture, studies the economics of farming systems and advises officials in America and across the developing world on agricultural policy. Dr. Gebisa Ejeta is Professor of International Agriculture at Purdue University. A native of Ethiopia, Dr. Ejeta recently returned from a year in Nairobi assisting the Rockefeller and Gates Foundations with the launch of their new joint initiative, the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa.

I look forward to your testimony this morning.