

## Hunger Reaches Record Levels

by Eric Muñoz

The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) announced June 19 that this year, 1.02 billion people will experience acute hunger every day. This represents an 11 percent increase over previous projections. Simply put, 1 out of every 6 human beings will experience acute hunger every day this year.

The spike in world hunger is a result of a two-year period of sustained high food prices compounded by the global economic downturn. These have led to lower incomes and higher unemployment. In response, struggling households have cut down on the amount of food they eat and switched to less expensive foods that are often less nutritious. The economic slump is now affecting developing countries severely; the World Bank expects economic growth to fall to 1.2 percent this year, compared with 5.9 percent in 2008 and 8.1 percent in 2007.

African economies, in particular, have been adversely affected by the global recession. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports that unemployment has increased sharply across the continent, rising as high as 40 percent in Kenya and South Africa. The rapid worsening of Africa's economic outlook has been caused by several factors, including a steep decline in the price of commodities exported by developing countries (including copper and petroleum), a decrease in remittances from people working overseas to their families at home, and a reduction in official development assistance.

Many of the countries hardest hit by the financial crisis were already experiencing high levels of hunger and malnutrition. The FAO has identified 31 countries which require additional assistance from the international community because of the severity of hunger and food insecurity. More information about child malnutrition in many of these countries can be found here ([www.hungerreport.org/2009/hotspots](http://www.hungerreport.org/2009/hotspots)).

On June 24, a summit held at United Nations headquarters in New York brought together representatives of developed and developing countries to discuss the impact of the worldwide downturn. The summit was organized to give a voice to the world's poorest societies



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and develop policies to aid them in combating the effects of the economic crisis.

Both the FAO and the OECD have called on donor countries to honor their aid commitments and to develop effective mechanisms of development assistance. "The silent hunger crisis—representing one sixth of all humanity—poses a serious risk for world peace and security. We urgently need to forge a broad consensus on the total and rapid eradication of hunger in the world and to take the necessary actions," said FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf.

This is the core objective of Bread for the World's work on foreign assistance reform.