

THE MILLENNIUM DECLARATION TO END HUNGER IN AMERICA

WE CALL UPON OUR NATION'S LEADERS AND ALL PEOPLE TO JOIN TOGETHER TO END HUNGER IN AMERICA

America carries the wound of more than 30 million people - more than 13 million of them children - whose households cannot afford an adequate and balanced diet. Hunger should have no place at our table. It is inconsistent with our commitment to human rights and objectionable to the American values of fairness, opportunity, family and community.

Our nation is committed to leaving no child behind. But children who are hungry cannot keep up. They cannot develop and thrive; they cannot learn or play with energy and enthusiasm. Hunger stunts the physical, mental and emotional growth of many of our children, and stains the soul of America.

Many different points of view unite us in this declaration. Some of us work to end hunger because of deeply held religious beliefs. Others are motivated by hunger's impact on health and cognitive development. Still others are driven by the long-term economic, human and ethical costs of hunger. But all of us are moved by the recognition that America's moral authority in the world is undermined by so much hunger in our midst. Regardless of our religious beliefs or political commitments, we share the conviction that we as a nation must act to end hunger—now.

Ending hunger is a two-step process. We can make rapid progress by expanding and improving effective initiatives like public nutrition programs. This, combined with strengthened community-based efforts, has the capacity to feed all in need. But we need to go even further, to attack the root causes of hunger.

Our nation's own past experience, and the successes of other countries, demonstrate that this two-pronged strategy can work.

ENDING HUNGER

America made great progress in reducing hunger during the 1960s and 1970s, as the economy grew and the nation built strong public nutrition programs - food stamps, school lunches and breakfasts, summer food, WIC, and elderly nutrition programs. These vital programs provide the fuel for children to develop and learn, and for adults to succeed at work and as parents.

As a country we did not sustain that momentum. One response has been the emergence of a strong private anti-hunger sector: food banks, pantries, soup kitchens, food rescue and other emergency feeding programs have become a key bulwark against hunger for many Americans. Volunteers, businesses, non-profits and religious organizations now help millions of needy Americans put food on their table.

But emergency feeding programs alone cannot end hunger. They cannot reach the scale essential to address the desperate need many people face, nor can they provide long-term security for the families they serve. Our country's experience over the past 20 years shows that charity can fill gaps and ameliorate urgent needs. But charity cannot match the capacity of government to protect against hunger, nor the capacity of the private sector to foster economic growth and provide living wages.

Ending hunger requires a sustained public commitment to improve federal nutrition programs, and to reduce red tape to reach every household and every individual in need:

- We can begin with the millions of at-risk children who start their school days without food, or who miss meals during the summer months, when they lose access to regular year school meal programs. Expanding programs for school lunch, breakfast, summer food, after-school meals for school age children, and child care food and WIC for pre-schoolers, is essential, cost-effective and a moral imperative.

- The food stamp program, the cornerstone of the nation's hunger programs, has the capacity to wipe out hunger for millions of families. We should reduce the red tape that often keeps working families and others from getting essential food stamp help. And the help families get should be enough so they do not run out of food toward the end of each month.

- We also must better protect elderly citizens whose frail bodies and meager incomes make them susceptible to hunger and nutrition-related diseases. Improving food stamps, home delivered meals, congregate feeding programs and commodity donations will ensure that increasing age does not also mean an empty cupboard.

These and related nutrition programs can become readily available through the support of innovative community efforts across our country. And all programs can be re-woven to deliver healthy, nutritious meals to ensure an end to hunger in America.

ENDING THE CAUSE OF HUNGER

The root cause of hunger is a lack of adequate purchasing power in millions of households. When individuals and families do not have the resources to buy enough food, hunger results. As a nation we must encourage work and also ensure all who work that the results of their labor will be sufficient to provide for the basic needs of their families. For those unemployed or disabled, or too old or young to support themselves, other means can ensure sufficient income to protect them from hunger.

Many steps can be taken to help families achieve independence and security: a strong economy; an adequate minimum wage that, like the one a generation ago, lifts a small family out of poverty; private and public sector provision of jobs and job training; strategies to create and increase assets among working families; social insurance protection for the unemployed and retired; and child care, refundable tax credits, food stamps and health insurance that reward work efforts of families trying to make ends meet.

A sustained and comprehensive investment in the efforts of all American families will ensure that inadequate income never again results in lack of needed nutrition for the children and adults of our country.

Taking these steps to reward work and effort, along with the ready availability of nutritious food programs, will ensure that residents of the United States are not hungry tomorrow or any time in the future. Ending hunger in America will reduce dramatically the deprivation that currently saps the lives of so many of our children and families. Ending hunger will make us a stronger nation.

This goal is achievable. The time is now. We call upon the President, Congress, and other elected leaders in states and cities provide decisive leadership to end hunger in America. Let us all work together, private and public leaders, community, religious and charitable groups, to achieve an America where hunger is but a distant memory and we live true to the values of a great nation.

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MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ANTI-HUNGER ORGANIZATIONS (NAHO)

WHO CREATED AND ENDORSE THIS DECLARATION:

America's Second Harvest

Bread for the World

Center on Hunger and Poverty

Congressional Hunger Center

Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)

Interfaith Hunger Coordinators

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

RESULTS

Share Our Strength

End Hunger Network