

Fighting Hunger

International Conference on Hunger hosted by Concern Worldwide

Opening Remarks by Tom Arnold, CEO, Concern Worldwide

I am delighted to welcome Kofi Annan and the distinguished panel of speakers to our Concern conference 'Fighting Hunger'. We also have a very distinguished and diverse audience, from governments, the private sector and civil society. All of you have a role to play in our common objective of fighting hunger and I welcome you to Dublin today.

We had two main objectives in organising this conference: (a) to inform political and public opinion about the continuing scale of hunger in the world, with its enormous human and economic costs and (b) to identify policy changes and innovations which, if implemented, could significantly reduce the number of hungry people.

Responding to the current crisis

We meet at a time of global financial crisis. The inevitable fallout from this crisis will include slower or negative economic growth, higher unemployment, and weakened public finances. This will have consequences for all of us living in developed countries. But it is the poorest of the world in the developing countries that are at greatest risk.

Over the past year, the number of hungry people in the world increased from some 850 million to 925 million, as a direct result of higher food and energy prices. Since early-2007, protests about high food prices and general living costs have occurred in almost 60 countries with violence occurring in over 20 of these. The current crisis will probably push the number of hungry people to well over one billion, about one-sixth of the world's population.

Well before this latest crisis driving more people into poverty, we knew the human and economic costs of hunger.

Half of the almost 10 million children under the age of five who die annually do so from a combination of malnutrition and easily preventable disease. Tens of millions of children suffer from physical and mental stunting as a result of chronic malnourishment of pregnant women and children under two years. The costs in terms of lost human potential and economic development of countries are enormous.

The food and energy price increases over the past year has had particularly serious consequences for the very poorest – the ultra-poor – who live on less than 50 cents a day and spend 50-70 per cent of that meagre income on food. Concern has been tracking through its regular Hunger Monitor* the impact of these price increases on the poor in our countries of operation in Africa, Asia and Haiti. We have observed that many in our target group – the poorest - have reduced their food intake and the quality of their diet and micronutrient intake has worsened.

Moving from political commitment to action

The high food prices in the first half of 2008 had one potentially positive effect. For the first time since the early 1970s, food security moved close to the top of the international political agenda. UN Secretary Ban Ki-moon, who has sent a message to today's conference, set up a High Level Task Force to draw up the elements of an effective response to the food price crisis. Following extensive consultation, it produced a Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) setting out the short and long term measures necessary to improve food security. The cost of implementation was estimated at an additional \$25-40 billion annually. In light of the scale of recent intervention by governments to rescue financial institutions, this must seem like a bargain.

The G8 Summit in Japan, held in July, discussed the food price crisis on the basis of a 10 point Plan of Action presented by the World Bank. The G8 leaders made some positive sounding commitments to action – but came up with no additional money.

The EU is considering using €1 billion in savings from its 2008 budget, savings due to higher world food prices and a consequently lower support costs for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), to support African countries provide inputs to their farmers for the next production cycle. Gay Mitchell, MEP, has played a positive role in shepherding the proposal through the European Parliament but the final decision has to be taken by the Council. It is vital that this decision is positive and that it is taken soon.

The critical questions we will consider at this conference is how we can contribute to mobilising political will, build on the solid analysis of the causes and solutions to the hunger problem and attract new actors into the fight against hunger.

Political leadership and commitment to end hunger is vital. Kofi Annan brings a unique moral authority in calling on political leaders in developing and developed countries to give greater priority to ending hunger.

African political leadership is particularly important given the scale of the hunger problem in that continent. We are fortunate to have with us African leaders of the quality of Minister Agnes Kalibata of Rwanda, Bibi Giyosi of the New African partnership for Development (NEPAD), Sheila Sisulu of the World Food Programme (WFP) and Akin Adesina of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)

Policy priorities

Putting an appropriate policy framework to reduce, and ultimately end, hunger is critical Professor Jeffrey Sachs, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General, and Dr Joachim von Braun of the Washington based International Food Policy Research Institute are among the world's leading experts on food policy and hunger alleviation.

Concern is very supportive of the policy priorities identified in the recently published report of the Irish Hunger Task Force, chaired by former Minister for Agriculture and Food, Joe Walsh. The report highlighted two key policy priorities. African governments need to give greater priority to agricultural and rural development in their development

strategies and investment plans. Scaling up investment in programmes to improve nutrition for pregnant women and for children under two years is also vital.

We are also long standing proponents of the recommendation that Ireland should play a leadership role at international level in the fight against hunger. We see a real opportunity for different strands of Irish expertise, in such areas as food science, nutrition and public health, agricultural and rural development strategy, to contribute to different countries working their way out of hunger.

We look forward to hearing Minister for Development, Peter Power, give the Irish government's response to the recently published report of the Irish Hunger Task Force,

Innovation and new partnerships

We see innovation and new partnerships as a critical part of national and the international strategies against hunger. Earlier this year the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia made an important gesture when it donated an additional \$500 million to WFP. Faced with volatile food prices and growing needs, funding for WFP needs to be put on a more secure and longer term footing. With aid budgets in the traditional donor countries likely to be under increasing pressure due to the fallout from the financial crisis, it is surely time for other energy producing countries and emerging developing countries to assist in improving food security at national, regional and global levels. This may be part of a wider debate on global governance and the future role of the different UN institutions working towards food security.

The commitment of the Gates Foundation to agriculture and its support for AGRA offers other possibilities for new partnerships with governments and NGOs. The private sector has a key role to play. Concern has entered into an innovative partnership with the Kerry Group, Ireland's largest food company, and IFPRI to carry out research, based within Concern's programmes in Africa, on how better nutrition and livelihood support can improve the situation for people living with HIV.

Translating what we learn from our work on the ground into policy recommendations and changes is why we have entered a strategic relationship with IFPRI. One part of that relationship is the joint publication, along with our Alliance 2015 partner, Welthungerhilfe (German Agro Action), of the 2008 Global Hunger Index, which we are launching at our conference today. This important document, which is produced annually, highlights the countries and regions facing the greatest risk of hunger. This annual report will continue to serve as an important indicator as to progress or otherwise we all are making in fighting hunger.

In conclusion: We meet at a time of great financial and economic uncertainty. We could yet be facing into a global economic depression although leaders everywhere will strive to avoid this. Whatever the short to medium outcome, we face the key challenge of devising and implementing the best policies to protect the lives and livelihoods of the poorest people on this planet. On a daily basis many of us here face the challenge of using the resources we have available to achieve the best outcome for the most vulnerable

with whom we work. I hope today will facilitate learning from each other so we can all do our job better.

*** Note**

As part of its campaign to place, and maintain, national and international focus on the hunger issue, Concern Worldwide is publishing a regular *Hunger Monitor*, a survey by the organisation's field staff which tracks local food prices and changing food habits in 16 countries across Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. It aims to identify key trends and reflect the challenges which millions of ordinary people in the world's poorest areas are facing in trying to access or produce food. It is also available to download at: www.concern.net/fightinghunger

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