

June 4, 2008

The Honorable Ed Schafer
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Schafer:

I write to express concerns I have with the use of U.S. taxpayers' dollars at this week's United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) summit on world hunger.

The decision by FAO Director General Jacques Diouf to invite both the president of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has made a mockery of this event. As you well know, Mugabe has brutally repressed his own people and contributed to starvation in his own country while Ahmadinejad is calling for the destruction of our ally Israel. Providing a U.S. taxpayer-funded forum for these men to present themselves as humanitarians is unconscionable.

As you know, the United States supports the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations with well over \$100 million annually. The UN assesses and collects these funds under the auspices of alleviating the world's hunger.

The U.S. should withhold our contributions to the Food and Agriculture Organization until FAO Director General Jacques Diouf resigns and is replaced by someone who prioritizes feeding the hungry rather than catering to attention starved dictators who have little regard for alleviating human suffering.

I'm also skeptical that federally funded conferences are an effective way to feed the world's hungry. In fact, it is the world's bureaucrats who are fed at conferences, not the poor or hungry.

As you know, we have worked hard on our subcommittee, with your assistance, to rein in wasteful and unnecessary conference spending. On its face, this event does not sound like a good prioritization of taxpayer funds.

To help add accountability to agency expenditures on this summit please provide the following:

(1) The total number of summit participants being supported by the Department of Agriculture, including government employees and others being sponsored to attend the event by the Department; and

(2) The total amount being spent on this event, with itemized expenditure totals for travel, registration, lodging and direct conference support.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom A. Coburn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" and last name "Coburn" clearly distinguishable. The middle initial "A." is smaller and less prominent.

Senator Tom Coburn, M.D.