

**Statement of Rev. David Beckmann,  
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and  
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**Before the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on  
Africa and Global Health**

**“A Call to Action on Food Security: The Administration’s Global Strategy”**

**October 29, 2009**

Chairman Payne, Ranking Member Smith and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify. I am David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, a collective Christian voice urging our nation’s decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. Bread for the World has worked for many years to strengthen U.S. development assistance for agriculture and food security. As is the case with most of the other organizations represented here today, Bread for the World has been closely involved with the efforts of the Roadmap to End Global Hunger Coalition. The attention brought to this issue by the new Administration and Congress is fantastic.

I also serve as co-chair of the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network, or MFAN, a broad coalition of groups and individuals working to make U.S. foreign aid more effective in support of global development and the reduction of poverty.

Over the past two years we have seen a dramatic increase in hunger as food and fuel prices rose and the global recession pushed millions of people into extreme poverty. In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of hungry people has increased from 198 million at the beginning of the decade to 265 million in 2009. In response, the United States and other donors have delivered emergency assistance to help those in need. I am heartened that the Obama Administration recognizes that in addition to addressing emergency needs we must also focus on creating long-term sustainable solutions to ending hunger and poverty.

**STRONG SUPPORT FOR FOCUS ON GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY**

The Consultation Document put forward by the administration outlining their priorities for the U.S. Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative provides a thoughtful, coherent, comprehensive approach to hunger and malnutrition. It is a tremendous first step

toward a global initiative that rallies the support of governments and people around the world. It also includes several core principles that form a blueprint for broader reform of U.S. foreign assistance that Bread for the World and the other organizations in MFAN subscribe to: investing in country-led plans; enhancing strategic coordination both within the U.S. government and among international institutions, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and civil society; leveraging the assets and tools of existing multilateral actors; and establishing benchmarks and targets as part of transparent and accountable evaluation systems.

### **IMPROVED NUTRITION AS PRIMARY INDICATOR OF SUCCESS**

The Initiative is remarkable for its vision. It recognizes that a comprehensive strategy to address hunger must go beyond simply increasing agricultural production, and that improving maternal and child nutrition is a central component of the administration's plan. Focusing our agriculture and food security investments on improving the nutrition of women and children will shape better, more targeted programs that have a lasting development impact. The primary measures of success of the Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative must be reductions in poverty and maternal and child undernutrition. We will be better able to assess the effectiveness of our investments in agriculture and food security by focusing on whether nutrition is improving within a country or population. And, because nutrition is affected by other factors such as access to basic health care services and the protection of women and girls, measuring the impact of U.S. investments on the nutritional status of women and children will also tell us how well our overall development efforts are working.

The long-term damage inflicted by undernutrition on young children is a moral outrage. Last year undernutrition took the lives of nearly three million children under five years of age. Tens of millions more children who are malnourished will suffer permanent physical and cognitive damage as a result of not getting enough of the right food to eat and clean water to drink. These children will be less productive workers in the future, resulting in long-term negative consequences for the economic development of communities and countries. Where undernutrition persists, the economic consequences are as high as 2 to 3 percent of lost GDP annually. In countries like Ethiopia or Burkina Faso, long-term poverty reduction will simply never be possible unless we take steps to improve child nutrition. The Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative provides an

opportunity for the United States to scale up the kinds of proven interventions that will make such progress against poverty possible.

In addition to working with national governments, the United States has taken the mantle of leadership on hunger and food security issues, a role we should be proud of. At the G8 summit in L'Aquila, Italy, President Obama convinced leaders from wealthy nations to invest \$20 billion in agriculture over three years to help poor people grow enough food and earn enough money to escape hunger and poverty permanently. Leaders also agreed to work collaboratively to make sure money is spent wisely, reaching those most in need. The initiative will, in part, rely on the World Bank to disburse funds and coordinate the activities of the many partners who are involved in food security: IFAD, the World Food Program, UNICEF, research institutions, and donor governments. This focus on a multilateral response is important and deserves the support of Congress.

#### **PROMOTE COUNTRY-LED PLANS**

Collaboration must extend beyond donors to include civil society and governments in developing countries as well. The Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative will rely on country-led plans to determine what investments to make. Agreement between donors and developing countries is possible only if country-level plans identify the particular barriers poor people face as well as the strategies to overcome them. As the Consultation Document states, "The most effective food security strategies come from those closest to the problems—not governments or institutions thousands of miles away." Too often investment decisions are not made based on needs identified at the country level. Rather, they are decided here in Washington.

The United States should insist that the process of developing and implementing country-led food security plans include the network of local institutions focused on alleviating hunger and poverty. By including local civil society organizations, faith groups, farmer cooperatives, private voluntary organizations, and local advocacy groups in identifying problems and solutions to hunger and undernutrition, the effectiveness of U.S. investments will increase. Inclusive participation will also increase commitment at all levels, making the grants the U.S. provides more sustainable over time.

Creating a forum at the national level for dialogue about hunger is one way of engaging diverse groups about what is needed to improve agriculture and food security. In some countries space for dialogue already exists. The Ghana Alliance to End Hunger, for example, is a focal point for organizations working to end hunger and undernutrition in that country. Networks representing hungry and poor people, especially women, must be brought in early as part of regular consultations with donor stakeholders.

### **REFORM U.S. FOREIGN ASSISTANCE**

While the administration's leadership on global food security and global health is to be commended, I also must emphasize the importance of broader foreign assistance reform to ensure that these and other important initiatives make a strong and lasting impact for poor people. President Bush led a major expansion of foreign aid, and President Obama proposes to double foreign assistance by 2015. I applaud this Congress for recognizing and supporting the Obama administration's 2010 budget request to provide more resources to international development in our fight against poverty. The administration's budget would also bolster the capacity of USAID and the State Department to carry out their development and diplomatic missions.

A substantial majority of U.S. voters favor spending more on effective programs to reduce hunger, poverty, and disease in developing countries. It's the right thing to do and the smart thing to do. But we all know that foreign aid could be spent better. If this administration and Congress manage to improve the effectiveness of U.S. assistance, our dollars will do more good for decades to come, and voters will continue to support increases in funding.

In a recent survey, 85 percent of registered voters agreed that we "need to modernize how foreign assistance is currently organized and implemented." In a poll last November – in the depths of the economic crisis – 87 percent agreed that "in a time like this, we need to make foreign assistance more efficient and get more of our aid to people who really need it."

There is clear momentum right now for foreign aid reform on both sides of the aisle. Earlier this year, Chairman Berman and Representative Mark Kirk introduced a bill which now has 119 bipartisan co-sponsors. The bill, which is a first step in reform, calls

for a U.S. national strategy for global development that establishes clear objectives and provides guidance and coherence to our development policy and activities. Bipartisan food security bills currently pending in the House rightfully call for the United States' own global food security strategy to be integrated within this broader national strategy for global development. As you are aware, Chairman Berman has also begun to think through the development of a new Foreign Assistance Act, which would replace the current legislative authority for U.S. foreign assistance that is nearly 50 years old and no longer reflects current global challenges.

In the Senate, Senators Kerry, Lugar, Menendez and Corker have introduced a strong bipartisan bill, S. 1524, that seeks to strengthen USAID and improve our ability to evaluate the effectiveness of U.S. foreign assistance programs. The White House is in the midst of a strategic review of all U.S. development policy, which will set us on a path to a true "whole-of-government" approach to how we engage with poor countries. And Secretary Clinton has launched the first-ever Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, modeled after the Defense Department's own quadrennial review, that will seek to better synchronize and leverage our development and diplomatic activities so that the U.S. government can pursue a balanced foreign policy which employs all the tools at its disposal strategically, efficiently, and effectively.

Taken together, these important efforts can culminate in serious reform of U.S. foreign assistance. And I think the programs and policies that guide development will be better as a result. But I also believe that these reforms will be even stronger and more durable if they have bipartisan support. Effective foreign aid not only makes sense, but is a nonpartisan issue.

### **EMPOWERED, DISTINCT DEVELOPMENT VOICE**

Under this administration, the State Department has demonstrated a deep commitment to global development and poverty reduction. But, it is crucial that some funding be dedicated single-mindedly to development. When we try to achieve defense and diplomatic goals with development dollars, aid is much less effective in reducing poverty. In my mind, that's the basic reason we need a strong development agency, with its own capacity to plan and carry out programs. These programs should be coordinated with other foreign policy purposes, but distinct from them.

Despite the fact that USAID continues to languish without an administrator, I strongly believe that the coordinator of the Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative should reside at USAID. Agriculture production in poor countries is fundamentally a development issue and should be led by our chief development agency. For far too long, we have usurped the critical responsibility of USAID to lead on the key development issues of the day through the proliferation of new entities and work-arounds. This has led to a fragmentation of our development policies so severe that it has perpetuated a self-fulfilling prophecy: the more we farm out USAID's authority, the more incoherent and convoluted our development assistance apparatus becomes.

We cannot afford to continue on this road. President Obama and Secretary Clinton are committed to elevating development as a coequal pillar of U.S. foreign policy alongside defense and diplomacy. To do so successfully, the U.S. government needs to have a strong and distinct development voice at the policy discussion table that can speak on behalf of development issues in a credible way. The new USAID Administrator should designate a high-level representative to coordinate the interagency efforts of the global food security initiative.

The appetite for meaningful reform of our food security efforts – and more broadly our foreign assistance programs – is large right now. But the window of opportunity for enacting reform is small. We must collectively capitalize on this rare moment in history to help poor people around the world. The administration's Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative is an enormous step in this direction. I strongly support the initiative, in particular its focus on maternal and child nutrition. However, to ensure its overall success, it is imperative that civil society in developing countries be engaged in a substantive way, and that the Initiative serve as a building block for lasting foreign assistance reform.

May God continue to bless your leadership.