

WORLD FOOD PRIZE
IOWA HUNGER SUMMIT
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Thank you, Ambassador Quinn for your kind introduction and for the invitation to address the Iowa Hunger Summit. I welcome all of you from across Iowa and the country to our beautiful city of Des Moines. The opportunity to address you is one of the wonderful perks of being the Bishop of Des Moines.

I often remind people that Iowa is in the heartland of our great nation. We are not the heartland simply because we are part of our country's breadbasket, but also because we give witness to a heartfelt solidarity with those who live in poverty and hunger, both here in the United States and abroad. Dr. Norman Borlaug, our favorite son, gave witness to this with his life's work.

For me as a Catholic bishop, food security and the relationship between food and peace are moral issues. In our Christian tradition we believe that lifting people out of poverty and feeding the hungry are serving Jesus in disguise. "For I was hungry and you gave me to eat." (Matthew 25)

Recently, I stood on the Mount of Beatitudes and celebrated Mass with 17 of my brother bishops on a Prayer Pilgrimage for Peace in the Holy Land. In the Beatitudes, we read: "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied" and "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5: 6, 9) These two Beatitudes connect the righteous pursuit of justice and the building of peace. People whose basic necessities of life are satisfied are less likely to engage in conflict. Peace is the fruit of justice.

Today, I want to speak to you based on my ministry as the Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Through my work with the members and staff of the Committee and extensive travel around the world, I've encountered people in many developing countries struggling to overcome the effects of poverty, hunger and conflict. I've also seen the inspiring and humbling work of the Church to support those in need through acts of solidarity, charity and empowerment. I have witnessed the mission of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) that partners with the Church in the developing world to alleviate hunger and poverty and build peace. CRS serves all on the basis of need, not creed.

I have learned a lifetime of lessons in these past three years as Chair of the International Committee. Drawing from my solidarity trips, I hope to describe what hunger in the developing world looks like and to explore three root causes of hunger: conflict, climate change and the harmful expropriation of land from poor farmers, so-called 'land-grabbing'.

What does hunger in our world look like? The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that 805 million people live with hunger: one in nine people on the planet. The vast majority of the hungry lives in the developing world. Hunger rates are highest in Africa where more than twenty-five percent are chronically hungry. In response to this unacceptable level of hunger in a world of abundance, Pope Francis said:

It is a scandal that there is still hunger and malnutrition in the world! It is not just a question of responding to immediate emergencies, but of addressing altogether, at all levels, a problem that challenges our personal and social conscience, in order to achieve a just and lasting solution.

Hunger strikes hardest at the most vulnerable people. In 2013 over 6 million children under the age of five died, 45% of them from the effects of severe hunger or malnutrition that

weakens their bodies and makes them helpless to fight many curable diseases. That is more children than died from AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. One in three children in the developing world is stunted and will suffer the physical, cognitive and psychological effects throughout their entire lives, crippling their ability to thrive as God's children.

In a visit to [Kabgayi](#) in Rwanda last year, along with my host Bishop [Smaragde Mbonyintege](#), President of the Rwanda Bishops Conference, I witnessed a young man otherwise well-built dragging a leg as he crossed the school yard. Explaining his condition, the Bishop said: "Like so many youth, he gets plenty to eat, but the food lacks nutritional value to develop fully."

Despite unacceptable statistics, we have reason to hope. In the last decade, the number of hungry people in our world has dropped by 100 million. Our biggest challenge is in Africa where today one in four African men, women and children face food insecurity (FAO State of Food Insecurity in the World 2014).

I traveled to Africa four times during my tenure on the Committee. We visited countries that are in the throes of conflict or are struggling to emerge from conflict. In South Sudan and the Central African Republic, I've met men and women and their families living in camps after being driven from their homes because of civil war. Many of these families have lost everything, their homes, clothing, and even kitchen equipment and farming tools. I've carried, hugged, and played with their children who suffer the most. Education is halted and curable diseases go untreated while other illnesses, like cholera, appear because clean water and proper sanitation in the camps are difficult to provide. Agricultural production drops in conflict zones and, as a result, food markets cease to operate and food is barely available for purchase. Organizations

like Catholic Relief Services are working in South Sudan and the Central African Republic to fill the gap and save lives created by the fighting.

Violent conflict is development in reverse. It destroys all the hard-won progress in human development and sets people back decades. I have been in South Sudan twice. It won its independence in 2011 after 40 years of horrible civil war that killed about 2 million people. For three years, the country had an opportunity to educate its children, provide basic health care and assist rural farmers to increase their food production. The country's leaders had the enormous bounty of oil wealth to pay for all these services.

It is tragic that instead of serving the common good and providing social services, political and military leaders turned to corruption and divisive political battles. In December last year, the political infighting turned violent and exploded into civil war that has killed some 10,000 people and displaced 1.3 million. An estimated 4 million people don't have enough food to feed their families; famine could strike hundreds of thousands. Although the international community and UN agencies are seeking to respond to the crisis, there is no sign that the political and military leaders are willing to halt the fighting.

I made a solidarity visit to the Central African Republic in July. It has experienced similar conflict to South Sudan where corrupt and misguided political leaders fight over access to political power and natural resource riches. This struggle provoked by political factors and the fight for control of the rich natural resources was insidiously instigated eventually between religious communities who had lived in peace for decades. What started as a fight over power and wealth led to religious conflict. In the face of this, Muslim and Christian religious leaders are now working heroically to restore trust and peace.

Our Committee continues to work with CRS to urge the U.S. Government to intensify its efforts to stop the conflict in these countries, to provide humanitarian assistance, and to help rebuild both the governments and civil societies in order to ensure future peace and prosperity.

Conflict is also a concern in many parts of Latin America. I recently visited El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, where the legacy of civil war and armed insurrection still weigh heavily on the shoulders of small farmers and agricultural workers. During a visit to Colombia last year, I heard first-hand accounts of the terrible conditions faced by farmers and their families at the hands of FARC guerillas and other paramilitaries. Often farmers were forced to grow illicit crops, such as coca. It can only be hoped that the current peace negotiations to settle the conflict in Colombia, which are being energetically supported by the Catholic Church in that country, will bear rich fruit.

Land-grabbing is a new threat that can cause hunger, particularly in Africa. Land-grabbing is the purchasing or leasing of large tracts of land by international investors that often violate the civil and land rights of the poor farmers who own or work the land. Long before the corruption and greed among South Sudan's elite led to the outbreak of civil war in December 2013, the country's politicians had begun to sell or lease their most fertile land to outside investors without the knowledge of the poor landholders who struggle to eke out a living for their families. In the four years preceding independence in 2011, South Sudan leaders signed land deals that handed over 12.7 million acres of land to outside investors. That amounts to over 8% of the South Sudan's total land mass, an area twice the size of Vermont. An extensive report by the Oakland Institute shows that none of the farmers was consulted during these transactions. People lost their land rights and often were not compensated. The report concluded: "As

currently conceived, these land deals threaten to undermine the land rights of rural communities, increase food insecurity, entrench poverty, and skew development patterns in South Sudan.”

The phenomenon of land-grabbing is occurring across Africa where foreign companies, investment firms and governmental sovereign wealth funds take advantage of countries where corruption is rampant and where land tenure laws are underdeveloped and disfavor poor landholders. In 2011, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) issued voluntary guidelines and acceptable practices on the responsible governance of land tenure issues. If African countries, international private companies and donor nations implemented these guidelines, the land tenure abuses or land grabbing would cease.

In a speech to the FAO, Pope Francis said, “We are all aware that one of the first effects of grave food crises... is the uprooting of individuals, families and communities. The separation is a painful one; it is not limited to their lands, but extends to their entire existential and spiritual environment, threatening and at times shattering their few certainties in life.”

Our Committee on International Justice and Peace has studied the phenomenon of land-grabbing and hopes to work with the Church in Africa to address the negative impacts of outside investment in agriculture and find ways to ensure that resource-poor farmers in Africa can benefit from the proper infusion of outside private investment in food production.

In both Africa and Latin America, land has become a battleground in the efforts to develop and exploit natural resources, such as oil, gold, silver, iron and other metals. The role that conflict minerals have played in funding rebel militia activities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is well known. In Latin America, extractives have been a source of division among local populations torn between the desire to protect their native heritage, while wishing to participate in the economic gains that proper exploitation of natural resources can promise. In

Peru, I met indigenous peoples facing eviction from their communities at the hands of large corporate investors seeking to exploit the mineral wealth of their territories. I am convinced that natural resources will only truly be blessings if there is a fair, efficient and effective regulatory structure in place that will ensure compliance with adequate safety, environmental and labor standards, and the consent and participation of local populations.

Perhaps the most threatening long-term challenge to food security is the impact of climate change. Pope Francis tells us that “Creation is a gift, it is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so that we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude.” He also warns that we must “Safeguard Creation. Because if we destroy Creation, Creation will destroy us!” It is tragic that his prophecy is coming true in far too many places.

The International Food Policy and Research Institute reports that Africa is particularly vulnerable to climate change. Most farmers in Africa depend on the rains. Large areas of Africa have seen their rains decrease dramatically, especially in the Sahel and in East and Southern Africa. Some countries may see up to a 50% reduction in crop yields by 2020. As many of you know better than I do, that would be disastrous for rural African families who produce 80% of Africa’s food.

Climate change has also fueled human conflict. In 2003 violent conflict in Darfur, Sudan broke out. It was triggered by drastic drought conditions that started in 1983. The drought destroyed pasture lands that herders depended on to feed their animals. When herders were forced to drive their flocks deeper into farmers’ lands, the animals destroyed many family crops. Farmers attacked the animals and the herders retaliated against the farmers. The Sudan regime fueled the conflict with new arms and large scale conflict broke out in 2003. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed, and about 2 million people displaced.

Our Committee has been working to identify and address the injustices that occur when we destroy creation and, as a result, destroy the lives of the most vulnerable people. We are a founding member of the Catholic Climate Covenant that strives to raise awareness of looming climate changes and the effects it will have on our lives. The Covenant offers us ways to lighten our carbon footprint and mitigate the ill effects climate change will have on humanity.

Environmental and climate issues are also of critical importance in Latin America, especially in the nations of Central America that I visited this past summer. Given the size of the countries in question, and the river and water distribution systems that they share, pollution and environmental damage in one country will have dramatic and dangerous consequences for all the other sovereign states in the region. The Catholic Church supports effective international and cross-border standards for environmental protection that will safeguard one country from suffering at the hands of illegal and imprudent practices in another.

In opening, I spoke of the relationship of justice to peace. People who can feed and support their families in dignity are less likely to be engaged in conflict. To build a more stable and prosperous world, we need to adopt policies that get at the underlying causes of conflict and hunger. Conflict increases hunger and hunger increases conflict.

It is my hope that you will join me in urging the U.S. Government to ensure that poverty-focused international assistance provides adequate funds to support others in building peace and prosperity in our world. In my travels to Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East I have seen the effects of conflict on hunger, and of hunger on conflict.

In these journeys, I have also witnessed the effectiveness of the United Nations in peace-keeping and providing disaster relief under challenging circumstances. We can be proud of agencies such as Catholic Relief Services, Bread for the World, and the Howard G. Buffett

Foundation representatives of which are on the ground and with dauntless courage confront root causes of hunger and conflict.

Most recently, I was in Israel and learned first hand from the legendary Israeli Statesman, Shimon Peres, of the projects of the Peres Center for Peace in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. President Peres and his associates operate from a platform of world vision. The Center is developing materials that prevent conflict and provide for healthy sustenance of our brothers and sisters in the human family. The Peace Center is working on the desalinization of water, preservation of the 33% of food that is wasted worldwide and the development of medicines from vegetables and fruits thus making them more universally available.

And of course, we are at the epicenter of provision of food for the future as the World Food Prize under the flag of Dr. Norman Borlaug develops in union with dedicated partners, strategies to nutritionally feed the world's billion inhabitants in 2050.

In my tenure as Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace, I've been fortunate to be able to travel to 23 countries to show solidarity and support on behalf of the U.S. Catholic Bishops in a very direct and human way. Even if you cannot do the same, you are here in Des Moines attending a summit on world hunger. You could be pursuing any number of other activities, yet you are here. I commend you for your commitment to be in solidarity with people living in hunger and poverty here in our nation and across the world.

As we fill the hungry with nutritious food, we significantly reduce the possibility of deadening conflict. And as we rally to reduce conflict through peace making, millions of the starving can be fed and put on the road to achieving their inherent dignity. May God bless your summit work and bring you success and may God bless you and your families. Thank you.