

Number of hungry people in world increasing by 4.5 million every year_50304

April 30, 2004

Posted: 5/03/04

The number of poor and hungry people around the world continues to grow at an alarming rate, according to Bread for the World's annual report.

Number of hungry people in world increasing by 4.5 million every year

By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

The number of hungry people in the United States and the developing world is greater now than it was when international leaders set hunger-cutting goals in the mid-1990s, said a recently released report by a faith-based anti-hunger organization.

At the World Food Summit in 1996, global leaders agreed to cut hunger in half by 2015—reducing the number of hungry people in developing countries from 800 million to 400 million.

But in its 14th annual report on world hunger, Bread for the World noted there are 842 million hungry people worldwide now, and the number is rising by 4.5 million a year.

The report attributed the hunger growth in part to a slowing world economy, wars and natural disasters.

Pledges by United States government leaders to cut the number of Americans living in hunger—from 30.4 million to 15.2 million by 2010—also are lagging behind, the report noted.

Currently, about 35 million Americans either don't know where their next meal is coming from, or they have to cut back on what they eat because they don't have enough money for groceries, the report said.

Food insecurity and hunger in the United States have increased three years in a row. Since 1999, the number of children living in homes at risk of hunger has increased by 1 million.

“There is no reason—save politics—that 842 million men, women and children are hungry,” said David Beckmann, president of the Bread for the World Institute, a nonprofit anti-hunger education and research organization.

“Even in a time of economic difficulty and conflict, the world—and certainly the United States—could still be making progress against hunger. What’s mainly missing is a stronger commitment.”

Ironically, the report noted a poll indicating 94 percent of American voters said it was important to them to pay for domestic anti-hunger programs, and 64 percent said the United States has a moral obligation to lead in fighting hunger worldwide.

“The most direct way for the United States to help reduce world hunger is to improve and expand development assistance—the kind of assistance that helps poor countries cope with AIDS or helps subsistence farmers raise their productivity,” Beckmann said.

Domestically, the U.S. government can fight hunger best by improving and expanding its federal nutrition programs, the report asserted.

“To end hunger, the United States must make it possible for everyone to receive a livable income. That requires better education and job opportunities, assistance that helps low-wage workers support their families, and a social safety net for people who cannot work, such as the disabled or elderly,” the report said.

Bread for the World disputed the assertion that faith-based organizations and other charities can end hunger without federal programs.

“Food banks and church pantries cannot provide enough food to the people who come to them and do not reach many of the people who need help, especially in sparsely populated rural areas,” the report said.

Private donations to soup kitchens, food banks and similar programs total \$2 billion to \$4 billion annually, compared to \$44 billion spent each year on federal programs that still are not meeting the needs of all Americans.

“Clearly, if the United States is to meet its goal of cutting hunger in half by 2010, our nutrition programs must be retooled and reformed to not only modernize and strengthen the current initiatives, but also to extend their reach to those people falling through the cracks,” Beckmann said.

The report called on citizens to “demand change” from elected leaders concerning policies that affect the poor.

“Instead of debating more tax cuts for the wealthy, U.S. leaders should be working to improve and expand development assistance to poor countries and federal assistance for hungry people in the United States,” the report said.

Baptist World Aid, the humanitarian relief arm of the Baptist World Alliance, was one of the sponsors of the Bread for the World report, along with Church World Service, the Mennonite Central Committee and other faith-based relief agencies. The International Fund for Agricultural Development provided major funding for the study.

For the full report, visit www.bread.org.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.