

Global downturn necessitates increased U.S. anti-poverty efforts

December 11, 2008

WASHINGTON (ABP)—The global financial crisis makes it even more urgent that the United States not only take care of its own economy, but also redouble efforts to aid the world's poorest, according to a new report and several development experts.

The 2009 edition of the Christian anti-poverty group [Bread for the World's](#) annual hunger report calls for the government to streamline international development efforts through renewed focus and a series of reforms—despite, and because of, the international economic downturn.

“At a time like this, we ought to use our foreign assistance effectively, and we ought to distribute more of our aid to struggling families around the world who are trying to overcome hunger and poverty,” said Bread for the World President David Beckmann. “This crisis has been a huge setback in the world's progress against hunger, poverty and disease.”

Massive increases in food costs

Massive increases in the cost of basic food items in many places around the globe have driven approximately 100 million more people into extreme poverty in the last two years, Beckmann said. The report estimates 75 million more people are malnourished than two years ago.

The United States should not use its own economic woes as a reason to cut back on foreign aid, Beckmann insisted.

“It would just be wrong for us to be so preoccupied with our own problems that we forget the nearly billion people in the world who do not get enough to eat,” he said.

The report calls for several reforms in the way U.S. development and aid work is conducted, including:

- *Elevating development and poverty reduction “as specific goals in U.S. foreign policy, distinguished from political, military and security goals, with distinct and secure funding.”*
- *Coordinating development assistance with recipient nations “to meet their long-term development goals and focus on outcomes with measurable goals and objectives.”*
- *Maintaining civilian leadership in U.S. development-assistance efforts, with the U.S. military’s role “limited to its operational strengths in logistics and stabilization.”*
- *Creating one “effective, streamlined agency” to channel all U.S. development assistance, now spread across 12 Cabinet departments and dozens of federal agencies and offices.*

“We need to have a consolidated agency that is separate from AID,” said Peter McPherson, president of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, referring to the U.S. Agency for International Development. McPherson was the agency’s administrator during the Reagan administration.

Polls show the majority of voters want to increase the aid the United States provides to the world’s poor, Beckmann noted.

“Their main motive is humanitarian,” he said. “People know that people on the other side of the world are desperately poor, and so that if Americans

think that they can really help, they are willing to help.”

World hunger threatens national security

Another motive is national security, because Americans know after 9/11 that misery in far-off places can breed terrorism at home, he added.

Beckmann noted the food and economic crises will increase instability in the world if not addressed properly.

“We’ve seen economic progress in many poor countries—and then suddenly a disappointment,” he said. “That’s an explosive situation.”

Several Baptist organizations—the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Baptist World Aid—cosponsored the report along with several other Christian denominational and parachurch groups. The report includes a Bible study guide for church groups to use in exploring what Scripture has to say about hunger and caring for the poor.