

National Anti-Hunger Organizations

Statement On the International Food Security Treaty

January 31, 2008

The proposed International Food Security Treaty (IFST) now under consideration in some House and Senate offices has the potential to drastically reduce world hunger and to bring about important corollary benefits to the United States by placing the right of freedom from hunger under the protection of enforceable international law.

The undersigned are members of NAHO (National Anti-Hunger Organizations) representing leading organizations involved with food bank and emergency feeding operations as well as anti-hunger advocacy, working throughout the United States to reduce hunger in America. We are united in urging all members of the House and Senate to do everything in their power to press for the promotion, adoption, and implementation of the IFST.

Our country has been on record in support of the right of freedom from hunger since it led in the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which referred specifically to the right to adequate food. Congress reaffirmed American support for strengthening that right in international law and called for numerous measures for that purpose in Public Law 103-236. Yet the absence of hard law to back up that principle has allowed malnutrition to exact a global death toll equal to that of a 9/11-scale attack every 3 ½ hours, a devastation visited mostly on small children whose the deaths stretch out for weeks or months. In addition, chronic malnutrition presently afflicts the world with the equivalent of another quarter-million such attacks, each with three thousand victims who, instead of being killed, are left disabled or seriously ill.

Experts agree that the international community could prevent malnutrition. However, the persistence of hunger despite sometimes heroic but inconsistent palliatives such as food reserves, foreign aid, and development remedies has caused more and more people to awaken to the need for the IFST. Treaty supporter and Nobel Laureate economist Amartya Sen has pointed out that in the modern era nobody starves unless someone else wants them to. Starvation is thus a socio-political problem, which, like past battles against slavery and industrial exploitation of children or for the enfranchisement of women, requires hard law for its solution.

The draft Treaty can be reviewed at the treaty's website www.treaty.org. In sum, it obliges each country 1) to **guarantee minimal nutrition** for people within its borders who cannot get access to it on their own; 2) to **contribute to a world food reserve and resource center** for any nation needing emergency help to meet that guarantee; 3) to **establish and enforce law** against the use of hunger as a weapon, and 4) to **support U.N. food security enforcement actions** if it's proven that any nation is unable or unwilling to enforce that law on its own.

Precursors, precedents, and/or presently functioning structures already exist to support all of the elements in the Treaty. The IFST will provide these goals the focus and commitment necessary to bring about their full implementation worldwide. (100% participation among U.N. member states is unrealistic at the start, but also unnecessary to achieve tremendous progress, which will in turn add momentum to the pursuit of 100% participation.)

UN Undersecretary-General Maurice Strong, a senior adviser to the World Bank, a leader of the international response to the Sudan famine in the 1980's, and former energy industry executive, describes the IFST as potentially "the centerpiece of a whole system by which the capacity of the Earth to feed its people is translated into a real commitment to do something, because there's no fundamental need for hunger now, and certainly none for starvation." We join Mr. Strong and the many lawmakers and leaders affiliated with NGOs, religious communities and the United Nations in supporting the IFST, many of whose statements can be found on the IFST website.

We find the IFST measured, narrowly focused on the elimination of the most egregious effects of hunger, and free of entanglements with more controversial food security issues. At the same time, it has the potential to greatly aid the eradication of hunger while conferring many benefits upon the United States. For example:

- The IFST can create markets for American agriculture and development tools and ingenuity.
- Finalizing and implementing the IFST will enhance opportunities for NAHO and other non-governmental organizations battling hunger to better assist governments in the collaborative work that will be required for success.
- The Treaty could greatly reduce the likelihood of military interventions arising like Operation Restore Hope in Somalia and reduce the burden on our military forces if one does arise—for in enforcement, as in foreign aid, all nations will be required by the Treaty to contribute their share in effecting its objectives.
- Since population rates generally decline in the wake of declining death rates, the reduction in global malnutrition following from the Treaty can be expected to slow population growth and its corollary impacts on the global economy, the environment, and regional and international stability.
- Finally, it should prove both easy and enormously helpful to American interests to position our nation as the world leader in ending the most terrible and widespread kind of suffering, which generates the broadest natural sympathy worldwide. By better aligning our visible role combating hunger with our nation's public stands on humanitarianism and human rights, the U.S. will harvest invaluable moral and political gains, lending greater force to our efforts to sway other nations to stand with us in matters of international conflict.

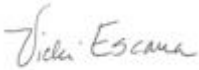
The time has come for a bold expression of our national character and principles to break through outdated suppositions about the permanence of hunger. We therefore urge those Members of the House and Senate who have not already done so to appoint staff to join the existing IFST working group crafting strategy and legislation in support of the Treaty. The objective will be to

provide resources for the advance of the IFST and to guide, and if necessary, to pressure whoever is President and his or her State Department to place the United States formally and firmly behind the IFST and to work to bring the world community along in making a reality of it on the ground. Taking the lead in achieving the universally-shared aspiration of a hunger-free world will enhance our nation's fortunes and pride and result in a healthier and safer world for our children to inherit.

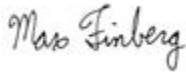
Sincerely,



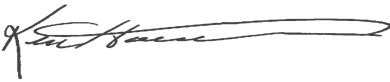
Bill Ayres, Executive Director
WhyHunger



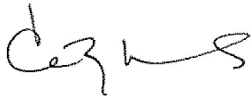
Vicki Escarra, President & CEO
Feeding America - The Nation's Food Bank Network



Max Finberg, Director
Alliance to End Hunger



Ken Horne, Executive Director
Society of St. Andrew



Cathy A. Morales, Managing Director
Association of Nutrition Services Agencies (ANSA)



H. Eric Schockman, Ph.D., President
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

Submitted in concert with NAHO signatories by
John Teton, Director
The International Food Security Treaty Campaign