



Election 2008: Global Issues for Faithful Citizens

In light of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' statement "*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship – A Call to Political Responsibility*," Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is providing this series of background papers to help Catholics in the United States assess the commitment of candidates for public office to global issues during this election year.

It is important to note that this resource focuses on one distinct part of the message of *Faithful Citizenship*, which should be understood in its entirety. Readers are strongly encouraged to review the full *Faithful Citizenship* statement in preparation for the 2008 presidential elections and beyond, available at www.faithfulcitizenship.org.

Find out Where the Candidates Stand on GLOBAL HUNGER

“Human dignity is respected and the common good is fostered only if human rights are protected and basic responsibilities are met. Every human being has a right to life, the fundamental right that makes all other rights possible, and a right to access to those things required for human decency—food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing, freedom of religion and family life.”

*(Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship –
A Call to Political Responsibility, page 14)*



The Global Impact of Hunger

Food insecurity is a major worldwide problem. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 860 million people worldwide are hungry the vast majority of whom – 830 million – live in the developing world. Food insecurity means that an individual or household does not consume a sufficient quantity (or quality) of food to survive; or, if there is sufficient food, the individual does not have the good health to use it properly. Food insecurity is measured by low consumption and high malnutrition and mortality rates.

The reasons for widespread food insecurity in a world of plenty are varied and complex, but the immediate causes are:

- The insufficient availability of food;
- Lack of physical and economic access to food;
- Poor use of the food.

While the International Food Policy Research Institute recently stated that a number of countries—including countries in Africa—have made good progress in reducing hunger and child malnutrition they also acknowledge that many of the poorest and hungriest people worldwide are still being left behind despite policies that aim to aggressively cut poverty and hunger.

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The Global Food Crisis: A New Factor in the Fight Against Hunger

The prices of many basic foods have skyrocketed in the last two years, leading to a major global food crisis affecting millions of poor people throughout the world. The price of wheat has doubled in less than a year, while other staples such as corn, maize and soy are trading at well above their 1990s levels. Rice, which is the staple food for about 3 billion people worldwide, has tripled in cost in the last 18 months. In some countries, prices for milk and meat have more than doubled.

The most damaging impact of the global food crisis is on the poorest people, who spend a far higher proportion of their income on food. In many cases, households that were spending 40 to 50 percent of their incomes on food before the crisis are now finding it increasingly difficult to afford basic rations. Those who are struggling to pay for food will eat less or cheaper food with less nutritional value. Even the middle class in many developing nations will have to sell their assets to pay for food.

The causes of the current global food crisis are many and complex. An increasing demand for food and energy at a time of low food stocks, poor harvests and weak credit have led to record prices for oil and food. CRS expects the global food crisis to continue until at least 2015 and is responding to the needs of people who are suffering from the effects of skyrocketing food

The U.S. Government's Response to Global Hunger and the Global Food Crisis

The longest running and largest U.S. government international assistance program is the Food for Peace program, also known as the P.L. 480 Title II food aid program. It is part of the U.S. Farm Bill that was reauthorized in 2008. The food aid program provides agricultural commodities and resources to respond to global hunger during emergencies such as drought or war as well as long-term development by supporting agriculture, education, health and other programs.

Over the years, the Title II food aid program has been allowed to shrink as other priorities vie for the federal budget. The amount of food aid commodities are half of what they were five years ago and with the skyrocketing commodity prices, even recent generous funding increases will not even get us close to the amount provided in 2007.

In 2008, the U.S. Congress made significant emergency funding for additional food aid available to reach people in need worldwide. It has also provided additional funding for agricultural development in poor countries. The new President and Congress will have to demonstrate leadership to address the short- and long-term issues related to the global food crisis.

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CRS' Response to Global Hunger and the Global Food Crisis

CRS is one of the largest providers of food aid in the world. CRS uses U.S. Title II food aid to respond to the needs of the people we serve through a wide range of emergency and long-term development programs:

- **CRS' emergency food aid programs** respond to the nutritional needs of people who are suffering from natural disasters, wars, or famine.
- **CRS' non-emergency food aid programs** use food as a long-term development tool to support education, agriculture, and health. For example, CRS may encourage children, especially girls, to attend school by providing food.

In almost all instances, CRS-sponsored food aid programs are carried out through networks of Catholic, faith-based, secular and governmental counterparts and partners overseas. CRS works to ensure that food aid is used to promote and preserve the physical welfare and economic development of the people we serve.

CRS advocates with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to address global hunger and the food crisis. Our positions include:

Short-term Responses:

The USCCB and CRS urge the U.S. government to provide emergency funding to help hungry people in the U.S. and around the world secure food. Immediate support to boost small farmer production in the developing world is also essential. If more people are displaced by riots and violence due to the food price increases, there may be a need to provide funding for soap, blankets, household items, clothing and shelter.

More U.S. Food Aid.

- Newly reformed by the reauthorized Farm Bill, U.S. government international food aid programs must be increased to address ongoing emergencies and to target the chronic malnutrition affecting so many millions around the world. Funding levels will have to rise substantially to account for increased costs of commodities and shipping, in order to provide adequate levels of food assistance to meet both acute and chronic needs.

More Cash-Based and Development Programs.

- Immediate responses to the food crisis must include cash for vouchers that, similar to domestic food stamps, permit poor families to get food they cannot otherwise afford.

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Long Term Responses:

Increase development assistance.

- Food aid used for long-term development must be complemented by, and integrated with, other long-term agricultural development programs. For example, the U.S. must partner with developing countries to engage in agricultural research to enable small farmers to apply new technologies, build rural infrastructure, and gain access to local, regional and global markets.
- Long-term investment should expand small scale production of staple food crops and empower poor people to add value to the crops they produce.
- Funding is needed to ensure that subsistence farmers can have access to seeds and fertilizer to increase their yields in the coming agricultural season. Investment will be needed in market infrastructures so that farmers can get their produce to market. Similarly, investments in small scale irrigation will help farmers ensure more consistent production, and may permit them to plant in more than one season. Agricultural investments should focus on poor farmers producing staple food crops.
- These programs should include disaster risk reduction components to help communities prepare for cyclical disasters such as droughts and floods. For example in Haiti, CRS is using cash vouchers to help the urban poor clear drainage canals and reinforce infrastructure to better withstand the annual hurricane season.
- Investments must also be made in post-harvest storage so that less food is lost to pests, weather and other factors.

Change U.S. agricultural policies.

- The U.S. and European Union (EU) should direct domestic agricultural spending toward those who need them most and minimize the impact of these supports on small farmers in developing countries. USCCB and CRS have called for such a change in recent trade negotiations and in Farm Bill legislation.

Respond to climate change and its impact on the poor.

- Many scientists believe climate change has affected global agriculture and access to food by changing weather patterns and creating droughts. USCCB and CRS are calling for a prudent response to climate change that minimizes its impact on the poor.

Make food a priority in biofuel policies.

- The current agricultural system should be re-evaluated in light of the needs of poor and hungry people in the U.S. and abroad. Access to nutritious food and the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices should be given priority.

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What You Can Do: Acting Faithfully This Election Year...And Beyond

As a U.S. citizen, you have a voice to raise and a vote to cast. Your proximity to elected officials and to candidates who want your vote can make a difference for the world's poor.

Get started in making a difference today:

- Read the U.S. Catholic Bishops' statement "*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship – A Call to Political Responsibility*" to learn more about the values of our Catholic faith and how they should be our guide to public life. Visit www.faithfulcitizenship.org for more information.
- Register and exercise your right to vote!
- Participate in a nonpartisan candidate forum and ask the candidates to explain their views on how the U.S. can address global hunger.
- Work to decrease poverty on a global scale through the USCCB/CRS *Catholic Campaign Against Global Poverty*. Visit www.crs.org/globalpoverty for more information.
- Receive regular updates and action alerts on both issues by joining CRS' Advocacy Network [http://actioncenter.crs.org/ signup](http://actioncenter.crs.org/signup).
- Pray for people throughout the world who lack adequate sources of daily food and whose access to food is at-risk because of natural disasters or conflict.
- Participate in the CRS Fair Trade program to help the economy work for disadvantaged artisans and farmers around the world. Visit www.crsfairtrade.org for more information.
- Engage your school or parish in CRS' 24-hour fasting program, Food Fast. Visit www.foodfast.org for more information.
- Participate in Operation Rice fasting, learning, and giving materials.

Questions for the Candidates

- **If elected, what would you do to fight world hunger?**
- **What specific policies do you propose to address the current global food crisis?**
- **Do you support changes in the U.S. farm support program and if so, how will these help small-scale farmers in the developing world?**



Bowl this Lent and offer your prayers, Visit www.orb.org for information and