

**International Student Young Pugwash  
&  
M S Swaminathan Research Foundation**

**Consultation on**

**“Food Security : A Great Threat to Human Security”**

**31 January 2007**

**Chennai Declaration on making Hunger History**

1. The World Food Summit (WFS) held in Rome in 1996 had resolved to reduce the number of hungry people in the world from its 1990 level to half of it by 2015. Four years later, the Un General Assembly adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The first MDG is that the proportion of people living in poverty as well as the proportion of hungry people in 2015 should be half of what they were in 1990. Taking stock in early 2007, we find that while even the weaker MDG 1 goal is unlikely to be met if current trends continue, fulfilling the WFS pledge seems a far more difficult proposition. **Compared with 1990-92, the number of undernourished people in the developing countries in 2001-03 has declined very marginally from 823 million to 820 million, a meager 3 million decline which is not statistically significant.** The current hot spots of hunger and under-nutrition are in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite some reduction in the number of hungry people between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, South Asia still faces high levels of hunger. India, despite its high GDP growth rate for almost two decades now, has shown little decline in the incidence of hunger. The bad news is that the number of hungry people, after declining between 1990-92 and 1995-97, has been rising in much of the developing world between 1995-97 and 2001-03.

2. Not all news is bad, however. China has been a major success story, having reduced the number of hungry persons by a huge 43.6 million between 1990-92 and 2001-03, even while its population increased by over 127 million. Vietnam reduced the prevalence of undernourishment from 31% to 17% and the number of hungry people from 21 million to 14 million. Both China and Vietnam have focused not merely on growth of GDP, but also on agricultural and rural development. Outside Asia, Peru and Brazil have done well. A key factor in Peru was that value added per worker in agriculture increased by 4% per year between 1990-92 and 2001-03. Policies pursued in all these countries with respect to meeting the challenge of hunger

merit greater attention, so that lessons may be drawn in order to achieve success elsewhere in the developing world

3. A state of affairs, in this day and age, where nearly a billion people remain undernourished, is simply unacceptable. As the Director-General of FAO has remarked, **“The world is richer today than it was ten years ago. There is more food available and still more could be produced without excessive upward pressure on prices. The knowledge and resources to reduce hunger are there. What is lacking is sufficient political will to mobilize those resources to the benefit of the hungry.”** The political will has to be generated by creating widespread awareness of food as a basic human right. The media, the judiciary and civil society all have a key role to play in this process, as do elected governments at the central, state and local levels. **Hunger in the twenty-first century is, quite simply, a reflection of the decline in the spirit, “Remember your Humanity” in the worlds of Bertrand Russel and Albert Einstein the Founders of the Pugwash Movement.** The challenge internationally is to make effective the right to food and eliminate hunger across the globe. The challenge for India is to find a development path that does not merely deliver high GDP growth rates, but transforms India from a republic of hunger to a republic of happiness.

4. Not all sections of the population have the same nutritional needs. Both a socio-economic basis and a life-cycle basis are relevant for setting nutritional priorities. A life-cycle approach to nutrition that focuses on pregnant and lactating mothers, children in the age group of 0-6 years, with particular attention to infant and young child feeding practices and adolescent girls is called for. Denying a new born child an opportunity for the full expression of his/her innate genetic potential for physical and mental development is the cruellest form of inequity. In terms of socio-economic priorities, we need to focus on the assetless and the petty producers, including small and marginal farmers and rural artisans. Further, while rural food insecurity is much the larger part of the problem, with increasing urbanization and migration to urban centers in search of employment, urban food insecurity will also need to be addressed.

5. Strategies to meet the challenge of hunger need to take on board the lessons of the last two decades. The lesson from China and Viet Nam highlight the importance

of agricultural growth led by small farmers. As the **World Food Insecurity Report of 2006** reminds us, the bulk of China's agricultural output comes from about 200 million very small (0.65 ha or less) farms. Increasing the productivity of small farms is one of the key steps to elimination of rural hunger. Equally important, is the creation of non-farm livelihood opportunities. Slow growth of employment even while the overall GDP growth rate is high is one important reason for the sustained prevalence of undernourishment on a large scale. Third, it needs to be recognized that nutritional outcomes are also critically dependent on non-nutritional factors such as investments in rural infrastructure including a variety of post-harvest facilities, empowerment of marginalized groups including women, and a variety of measures relating to education, public health, sanitation and environmental hygiene. As already mentioned, nutritional interventions must also be life-cycle based.

6. Global policies are critical to the success of national policies to address hunger, given the increasing levels of integration in the global economy and the increasing vulnerability of developing economies to global developments, arising at least in part from the manner in which international financial institutions pressurize them to adopt neoliberal policies. Here, the WTO Doha round, billed originally as a development round, but sadly belying the name so far, becomes important. These negotiations must not only lead to the elimination of unfair trade practices of the advanced countries by way of huge subsidies and arbitrary sanitary and phyto-sanitary conditionalities constituting non-tariff barriers to agricultural exports of the developing countries. They must also recognize the importance of agriculture as a livelihood for the vast majority of the population, fundamentally different from the largely commercial motivation of agriculture in the developed world. Of particular concern in terms of livelihoods and employment is the danger that transnational supermarkets pose both to farmers and to millions of petty producers and traders in the developing world. There is also a need for global as well as national recognition of the implications of HIV-AIDS pandemic, its links with tuberculosis and the enormous implications for food security in any effective strategy to address the hunger challenge. At the same time, steps to control HIV/AIDS should involve a food cum drug approach, since nutrition support is essential for getting the benefit of drugs.

7. At the international, national and sub-national levels not only the formulation of proper policies are of the essence, but also the expedient and efficient execution of

existing provisions, policies and programmes. Socio-economic and political analysis should focus on the political and governance limitations that hinder the implementation of those programmes in practice. To remedy such shortcomings, policies and their implementation should be conceptualized, locally grounded, people centered and empowering.

8. The attack on hunger clearly has to be a global commitment and enterprise. The first step in this enterprise has to be an unambiguous delineation of the objective. **This Consultation recommends that the goal should be abolition of hunger by 2015, and not halving the proportion or the number of the hungry in relation to any chosen base year.** As has been stated already, hunger in the present age of enormous technological and economic advance and achievement is inexcusable. The world and its constituent countries need to move as quickly as possible to legislate the right to food into their constitutions. A global coalition for a hunger-free world needs to be built up urgently to achieve the minimum goal of abolition of hunger by 2015.

9. We recommend the following five steps to achieve the goal of a hunger-free world by 2015.

- All Member States of the UN should make the right to a balanced diet, clean drinking water, environmental sanitation, primary health care and primary education a basic human right. UN should set up a Statutory Body to provide political oversight to the global and national efforts to achieve the goal of a Hunger-free world by 2015. Such a Body should comprise representations of G8 and G20 nations, drawn particularly from food surplus and food needy nations.
- The annual global requirement of foodgrains to ensure that 820 million children, women and men do not go to bed hungry will be about 200 million metric tonnes or about 10% of the current global foodgrain production. The untapped production reservoir, even with the technologies currently on the shelf, is high in most cropping systems in most developing countries. Therefore by enabling developing countries to improve small farm productivity, on the one hand, and by encouraging industrialised countries to launch a special, “Making Hunger History Production Drive” on the other, it should not be beyond our technological and economic capability to produce the needed quantities of foodgrains. The challenge will be to get the needed food to the right person at the right time and place.
- The World Food Programme currently allots 90% of food grains available to it for emergency relief, with the rest going to Food for Development programmes. A third window should be opened in WFP for achieving the goal of freedom from Hunger through **an Universal Food Guarantee**

**Programme**, which combines the features of Food for Work and Food for Human Development programmes, with priority attention to pregnant and nursing mothers, infants and children and old and infirm persons. All nations should contribute together 200 million tonnes of food grains annually for implementing to Food Guarantee Programme. Jointly with WFP, the proposed UN Body for a Hunger-free world can coordinate the efforts in this area.

- The Doha Round of WTO negotiations should make the following two commitments for ensuring the successful accomplishment of a hunger-free world by 2015
  - All technologies which can contribute to enhancing human nutrition and health security should be open for the compulsory licensing of rights, so that there is social inclusion in access to life saving technologies protected by intellectual property rights.
  - Nations where over 50 percent of the population depend upon crop and animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry and agro-processing as the primary source of work and income security in rural areas should have the right to impose quantities restrictions on the import of commodities which can result in destroying local livelihoods/jobs. Safeguarding and strengthening local livelihoods should be the bottom line of all trade policies. This is essential since the famine of work or sustainable livelihood opportunities is now the predominant cause of chronic hunger.

If such steps are taken trade can become a strong ally in the movement for a world without hunger.

- Predominantly rural and agricultural countries should promote decentralised community managed food and water security systems, which involve the organisation by the community field gene banks to conserve local grains, seed banks, food banks and water banks. This will help to enlarge the food basket by including a wide range of nutritious but underutilised crops in the domestic diets. Today, global food security systems depend upon less than ten major crops. This is potentially dangerous, particularly in the context of impending adverse changes in temperature, precipitation and sea level as a result of climate change. Conserving agro-biodiversity and linking conservation, cultivation, consumption and commerce in the form of local level food and nutrition security systems will help to strengthen both food and livelihood security.

10. Where hunger rules, peace cannot prevail. The knowledge era opened up by modern information communication technology (ICT), space technologies and other areas of science relevant to sustainable advances in agriculture, provide uncommon opportunities for achieving the goal of food for all and for ever. The UN Millennium Development Goals represent a global common minimum programme for sustainable human security. There will be lasting peace and security for all, if the basic minimum needs of every humanbeing can be met. There is no technological, economic, social or political excuse for not doing so.