

## One billion people are now starving

John Dear | Jun. 30, 2009 On the Road to Peace

It's official. As of last week, according to the United Nations, over one billion people are now starving to death. That's one in six people across the globe. That's an 11 percent jump from last year.

You might not have heard the announcement. The Associated Press gave it but a moment's notice. And yet here lies one of the most monstrous scandals of the world. And the scandal indicts us, especially us First World Christians.

News of this epidemic of hunger should blare from every front page. Every politician should be inveighing against it from behind a dais; every commentator should be discussing it before a camera. It should be on the hearts of people of faith. And together we should come to a firm resolve -- to bail out the starving, not bankers; to reallocate the billions in war funds to those on the verge of dying. Demilitarize the nations and feed the starving -- then will life be doubly served.

The grim announcement, issued out of Rome, came from the U.N Food and Agriculture agency. Of course, many relief agencies have known the enormity of the figure for some time and have redoubled their efforts. But collapsing economies and increases in military spending have plundered charitable funds. And now the poor don't merely get poorer. They die -- and in greater numbers than ever in history.

As Rich Heffern reported recently in the *National Catholic Reporter*, many officials from relief organizations are optimistic that hunger can be stopped. I'm not optimistic, so I called a few of those officials to press them on the question.

Most based their hope on the "Roadmap to End Global Hunger," a project supported by a diverse coalition of more than 40 international relief and development organizations, including Bread for the World, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Friends of the World Food Program, Mercy Corps, and Save the Children.

Together they're trying to enact a comprehensive plan, announced just this past February. Among other things, it calls on Congress for legislation and asks the president to install an international hunger coordinator in the White House.

Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., and Rep. Jo Ann Emerson, R-Mo., co-chairs of the House Hunger Caucus, subsequently introduced legislation based on the Roadmap to address global hunger and improve food security.

"We have the resources to end hunger in our lifetimes -- what we need is the political will to make it happen," McGovern said.

Here lies the sticking point -- political will. And I'm skeptical that the nation can conjure it because no nation can end hunger and maintain a war economy. It's one or the other. The implication is clear. If we declare war on hunger then the coffers for so-called defense would become barren as a dry well and largess beyond counting

would rightly deluge Latin America, Africa and Asia. Here would be a Marshall Plan on a global scale -- and a cause for celebration. But so far there's neither the will nor the leadership to make it so.

Where is the political will to come from? From the bottom up. "Effective means to redress the marginalization of the world's poor will only be found if people everywhere feel personally outraged by the injustices in the world and by the concomitant violations of human rights," Pope Benedict wrote in his 2009 Word Day of Peace message, "Fight Poverty to Build Peace."

Meantime the "Roadmap to End Global Hunger" is a start. It seems to me something worth pushing. And as we do we'll be putting ourselves on a spiritual journey. Send donations to Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children and Oxfam, especially as charitable donations are in decline. Support lobbying efforts through Bread for the World. Speak about the calamity, fast in solidarity, study the causes.

Make the link with other pressing issues: hunger and disease, hunger and environmental destruction, hunger and terrorism and war. And make the inverse link: Hunger impugns God's vision of shalom for the earth. If we campaign to end hunger we'll simultaneously promote universal healthcare, environmental protection, liberation for the oppressed, social justice and global peace. All these are bound together.

And of course, pray. But pray specifically and deliberately -- for an end to starvation, nuclear arsenals, global warming. Pray for the rising of political will, will enough to abolish hunger forever.

I acknowledge how hard it is to keep horrific reality before our eyes -- this especially when the media insists on focusing our thoughts on the South Carolina governor's adultery and the minutiae of poor Michael Jackson's last days. But prayer refocuses us. It keeps us mindful and sets us free to be mournful. Our hearts and minds so inclined, we learn to live in concordance with the heart of God, who founded the world on the idea of shalom.

A young person once wrote to Gandhi for advice on how to live for such a world. Gandhi offered this pearl:

Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest person whom you have seen, and ask yourself if the next step you contemplate is going to be of any use to that person. Will that person gain anything by it? Will it restore that person to a control over his or her own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to freedom for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away.

As Christians we name the starving masses Christ-among-us. "Whatever you do or don't do to me in the least of these," Jesus says in Matthew 25, "you do or don't do to me. When I was hungry, you fed me. Or you didn't."

Today's grim news begs for a response from the Christian community. Let us pray and do what we can to end hunger and serve Christ in the poor.

\* \* \* \* \*

John Dear will speak at the Pax Christi National Assembly in Chicago, July 17-19; see [www.paxchristiusa.org](http://www.paxchristiusa.org). St. Anthony Messenger's Press recently published *John Dear On Peace*, by Patricia Normile. John's two new books are *A Persistent Peace* (Loyola Press) and *Put Down Your Sword*, (Eerdmans). For information on his books or to invite him to speak at your church or school, see: [www.johndear.org](http://www.johndear.org)

\* \* \* \* \*

**A Message from John Dear about his NCR Columns**

Dear Friends,

Thank you very much for reading and supporting my weekly column. I've been writing these reflections every week for three years now, and am blessed to share my reflections, journeys, concerns and hopes.

I write now to ask your help with these writing projects. Each week about 2,500 people read these columns. *NCR* and I would like to reach a regular audience of 5,000 people by the end of the year. Would you please send an email to ten friends and ask them to sign up and receive my weekly column for free when it is published every Tuesday morning at NCRonline.org. Any other outreach you can give to promote this column would be greatly appreciated. Here's a page [direct link to the e-mail sign up](#) [1].

Thanks, too, for sharing your responses to my reflections. And thank you for all you do for justice, disarmament and peace, for teaching and practicing Gospel nonviolence.

God bless you,

Fr. John Dear, S.J.

---

**Source URL (retrieved on 07/27/2017 - 02:15):** <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/one-billion-people-are-now-starving>

**Links:**

[1] <http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup>