

## Why Work to End Hunger?

Why should those of us who are better off work to end world hunger?

Many people worry that if the hunger problem is not solved, it will disrupt their own lives. Perhaps we too may become victims of hunger one day.

Also, we in the richer countries should be concerned for our own security. As Senator Daniel Inouye put it, "... it is important to the maintenance of our democracy and our standard of living that we not be encircled by a sea of turbulence, a sea of starving, rioting people. The maintenance of our democracy and our security in its fullest requires stability and peace on a world-wide basis."

Lack of food often causes revolutions. Prime Minister Mugabe of Zimbabwe warned: The poor people of the world "will not agree to starve to death in peace."

Even if richer countries are not threatened by violence from the poor, they face other pressures. President Reagan warned that if his Caribbean aid program was not approved by Congress, the American people might face "an exodus of desperate people" to the United States.

Some argue that improving the quality of life in poor countries makes them better markets for our products. So both poor and rich nations are better off.

Others contend that ending hunger reduces birth and death rates and thus helps limit population growth (to the advantage of all).

While asking "Why end hunger?" maybe we should also ask, "Why not end hunger?" There are some good reasons to let it continue, or even perpetuate it. First, the need for massive aid and technological developments to end hunger may cost too much.

More importantly, hungry people work cheaply and provide people in richer countries with low-priced goods—including cheap food. Also,

transnational corporations often depend on cheap labor in poor countries for their profits.

Perhaps helping the poor would actually be destabilizing. Revolutions may arise more readily from temporary and incomplete relief that leaves rising expectations unmet than from continuing poor conditions.

Many accept the Malthusian view that ending hunger would lead to a population bomb. Thus, it is reasoned, ending world hunger would severely disrupt the present world structure.

One final reason that few voice openly is the "social Darwinist" view that poverty is *prima facie* evidence of inferiority. Those who are poor and hungry ought to be allowed to die in order to improve the quality of the world's population.

But all of this reasoning is defective—morally defective—since it is based solely on considerations that affect our own welfare and interests. These arguments reveal no concern for the hungry themselves.

In my view, the only good reason for ending hunger is that it is not right for people to remain hungry. People should live in dignity because they are people. No other reason is necessary. Any other reason is inadequate.

Compassion, or more precisely, love, is the appropriate reason for ending hunger, not calculation of value for oneself. The link is neither physical nor mechanical but essentially spiritual. It is more complicated than the intertwining of separate fates on our common Spaceship Earth; that is only a mechanical connection. Rather, the issue is a shared feeling. Your joy is my joy. If I am safe but you are hurting, I, in fact, hurt also. That is love.

Sending only a check fails to acknowledge that deeper connection. We should not say, "They are hungry." But "Some of us—that is, we—are hungry." The questions about what we ought to do demand deep reflection. —George Kent, Professor, University of Hawaii.