

Ending Hunger: Real Solutions—YES-Really!!!

by: David Tuckman

LOS ANGELES— Nearly 1.4 billion people in developing countries live in extreme poverty, living on less than \$1.25 a day. The world sees America doing its part to combat world hunger, but, surprisingly, more than one in four American children are at risk of hunger and more than one in five of these American kids live in households that struggle to put food on the table. In honor of United Nations Day and the United Nations Association-USA's month-long commemoration, in California, the San Fernando Valley Chapter held its UN Dinner "Ending Hunger: Real Solutions" with keynote David Gist, the Regional Organizer for Bread for the World, October 28, at Marie Calendars Restaurant in the banquet room. Fittingly, the invitation to this free event read, "Hungry: Just pay for what you want to eat," emphasizing that many people go hungry despite ample food supplies, simply because they cannot afford to buy the food they so urgently need.

Gist had lived in Nicaragua, where for 6 years he reported on international development and socio-economic issues and worked for a Nicaraguan Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that carried out relief and development work and helped communities develop leadership and identify their needs. He shared how airplanes full of food and medicine would land in Nicaragua to provide emergency food aid following a massive earthquake and the Nicaraguan teams would race to unload and distribute the aid as soon as possible so as to get out as much food as possible before the Nicaraguan National Guard arrived. "You'd think the National Guard was there to help the people—to help the relief workers distribute the food, but you'd be dead wrong," said Gist. "The National Guard was there to confiscate the food. Nicaraguan leaders had to make a deal with the President of the country that upon landing the planes for future shipments of emergency aid, they'd have exactly 5 minutes to get out as much aid as they could before the [National] Guard got there." It wasn't the best deal but it was better than the alternative, Gist stated. "It's tragic that when good people are trying to help their neighbors, they run into their own government working against them due to corruption. But even though corruption is a problem in some places," Gist explained, "you still need to continue your relief work, because if you don't, who will?"

There are successful U.S. Government programs under the Obama Administration, and one of the most effective is Feed the Future, which works with communities in the poorest parts of the world to solve their problems. "Bread for the World works to urge the nation's decision makers in Congress to end hunger at home and abroad," Gist said, adding that, "By changing policies, programs, and conditions that allow hunger and poverty to persist, we provide help and opportunity far beyond the communities where we live."

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are 8 basic goals signed by World leaders with #1 to eradicate world hunger and cut poverty in half by 2015. "In spite of the many advances in the last half century, 1.4 billion live in extreme poverty. The MDGs represent unprecedented support for the world's poor," said Gist, before leading a Jeopardy game show themed on Foreign Assistance.

The audience composed of citizens from Los Angeles and the surrounding San Fernando Valley were treated to Foreign Assistance Jeopardy as part of the UNA-USA event. During Jeopardy the audience was shocked by the statistics. "Really, 94% of all U.S. food aid comes from the U.S. government and

only 6% comes from U.S. non-profit relief organizations,” responded audience member, Dr. Barbara Pampalone, who had believed non-profits gave a larger percentage of assistance. The reality is that, “the U.S. spends more on Emergency Food Aid than Development Assistance for Agriculture,” Gist explained. “That is, buying and shipping the food aid to those overseas wastes a lot of money on those costs, because the shippers aren’t donating their time and equipment, but charging for it.”

Finding ways to provide aid without the large costs is a challenge. Actress Marsha Hunt, who attended the UN Day dinner, worked with Senator McGovern on the commission to Reduce Hunger, worked with President Kennedy, and drafted the bill signed by Congress and signed by President Carter to establish a program on Thanksgiving where people give money to end hunger and poverty but they must give checks to end hunger overseas. President Carter gave his Thanksgiving Day address urging the public to give and he reached out to U.S. humanitarian organizations, the clergy of major religious denominations, and the people. “Sadly, the funds to keep this program going fizzled out,” said Hunt, who has high hopes it could be re-invigorated under the Obama Administration.

The Obama Administration is doing more than just food assistance. With improved routine vaccinations, measles deaths around the world are reduced and have declined since 1990 in Sub-Saharan Africa by 91%. The United Nations Foundation (UNF)--a strategic alliance partner of the UNA-USA--has partnered with the American Red Cross on the UNF/Red Cross Measles & Rubella Initiative and has shown great success in disease prevention. Gist praised the efforts of UNF & Red Cross adding that the Measles Account in Congress supports clean water wells and this effort makes a tremendous difference.

Talking of differences, with 16,000 children dying from hunger related causes every day, groups like Bread for the World, UN Foundation, and UNA-USA are making the difference, every day, hour, and second. Education is key and knowledge turned to action is power.