

A Charter to End Extreme Hunger

Up to 750,000 people face death from hunger in East Africa. Millions more are at risk across the region in the worst food crisis of the 21st century. They will have to bear a legacy of poverty, suffering, and the loss of their livelihoods. Urgent action is needed right now.

But the truth is that this crisis was predicted – and preventable: we already have the knowledge to stop this kind of tragedy from unfolding; we know the steps that must be taken to prevent suffering on this scale.

Women, men, and children dying of hunger is not acceptable. We all have a responsibility to prevent this from ever happening again.

1. Fix the flaws of the international emergency system

Early warning systems are already in place across East Africa. There were early indications that this crisis was growing but the warnings went largely unheeded – just as in so many previous disasters. Large-scale action to prevent the worst of these crises did not come in time. The delay in waiting for a disaster to unfold before acting costs both lives and money. It is wrong to see a crisis coming and do nothing to prevent it. The system, including national governments, donors, UN agencies, NGOs, and funds like the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), must be flexible enough to respond to changing situations with the right interventions at the right time. There is no single solution, but together these commitments – when enacted – will improve the system to break the cycle of crisis.

- We commit to link non-political, needs-based early warning signs of disasters with a timely and appropriate response, with donors supporting national and community preparedness plans and capacity to avert disasters' worst effects, such as acute malnutrition
- We commit to support a UN General Assembly resolution that requires that CERF funds are released at the first warning signs to meet the emerging needs and support immediate intervention – with transparent processes to ensure funds reach those affected as quickly as possible
- We commit to support national and community preparedness plans, capacity, and activities in line with humanitarian principles to avert disasters' worst effects, such as acute malnutrition

2. Supporting local food production

Decades of under-investment in small scale food producers and ineffective management of natural resources, have contributed significantly to the crisis in East Africa, with livestock farmers particularly hard hit. Globally, long-term investment in agriculture and adapting to the risks of climate-related disasters has been inadequate to support the poorest in feeding themselves and contributing more to national economies. Putting adaptation to climate change and the reduction of disaster risk at the heart of development approaches must be a top priority. Failure to act is costing lives every day as people struggle to deal with shocks such as the changing climate and rocketing food prices. This has to change.

- We commit to fulfil urgently and rapidly the pledges we made to the l'Aquila Food Security Initiative (AFSI)
- We commit to agreeing a longer-term plan for after the AFSI expires in 2012, to fight food insecurity and malnutrition, that includes ensuring disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation are placed at the heart of development approaches.
- We commit to support signatories to the Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in accelerating fulfilment of their pledges to spend 10% of national budgets on agriculture development

- We commit to implementing the global and regional policies that already exist on investment in agriculture, livestock farming, and pastoralism to promote maximum food security for all.

3. Services and protection for the poorest

Millions of people around the world are living on the edge of survival, always close to disaster. We can help those people move back from the brink with two changes: social safety nets, and fairer investment. Safety nets can protect millions of people from the worst of the crisis: they stabilise families' income throughout the year so they are not forced to sell what little they have to feed themselves. Fairer investment is simply respecting the right that everyone has to essential services such as health care and education. Whether it is between regions or between women and men, injustice and inequality is a matter of life and death.

- We commit to investing in development strategies that see fair provision of essential services and investment in livelihoods in every country by 2015
- We commit to protecting at an absolute minimum the poorest 10% of the population from the impact of food crises with safety nets. This will include direct cash payments based on need alone, specifically addressing the food and nutrition needs of women and children.

4. Food everyone can afford

Spiralling food prices have contributed to tipping some areas of East Africa towards disaster. We cannot stop acute food crises unless everyone can access food at a price they can afford. The number of people without enough to eat is increasing. Food price spikes are also a major part of the problem. We have waited too long to fulfil the simple right of every person to affordable food.

- We commit to scaling up strategic and emergency food reserves at local, national and regional level, ensuring the governance of these reserves is accountable to the people they are intended to serve.
- We commit to tackling the causes of high and volatile food prices by taking action to end biofuel mandates and limiting governments' use of food export bans.

5. Reducing armed violence and conflict

It is impossible to end mass death by starvation without reducing the violence that is one of its principal causes. The world has not only tolerated the fact that hundreds of thousands of women, men, and children live without help or protection during times of conflict. It has done too little to address the vicious mix of poverty, poor governance and violence that sustain conflicts. This must be replaced by urgent action to protect and assist people now – and to tackle the fundamental cycle of violence and poverty.

- We commit to providing – and allowing unfettered access for – timely, appropriate, and sufficient humanitarian assistance based on need where insecurity is destroying the chances of life and sustainable development.
- We commit to press for, and support, practical measures to protect people affected by conflict, including more vigorous and sustained diplomatic engagement to help all parties involved to local and national conflicts find just, sustainable, and secure solutions.