

## Eritrea: Hunger and Children

Ibrahim lives in Falhito, a village in the country of Eritrea. The village is 13 kilometers from the nearest school and every school day, Ibrahim walks three hours each way through extreme heat and rugged terrain to attend class. But food is scarce in Eritrea, a small country on the Horn of Africa. Because of drought and the resulting famine and economic hardship, hunger and food insecurity is widespread. As a result, absenteeism in schools has risen greatly as children experience hunger-related illnesses, do not have the energy to go to school, or are forced to stay at home to help their families make a living. When asked why he was not coming to school when he is such a good student, Ibrahim responded, "I was too hungry. I stayed home to make sure that I got something to eat." Other classmates have fainted because of lack of energy resulting from malnutrition, and physical education classes had to be cancelled because reduced calorie intake could not support the physical activity.

Source: Mercy Corps, <http://www.greatergood.com/newsroom/th/Stories.html>



Source: UNICEF, [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

### Facts about Hunger:

- Six million children under-5 die every year from hunger.
- Eritrea is in the midst of one of the worst droughts recorded in recent history. Experts say that an additional 300,000 metric tons of food aid are urgently needed to meet the needs of the poor, who are experiencing extreme food shortages.
- Every five seconds a child dies because she or he was hungry.
- Hunger is inherited. Each year, 17 million children are born underweight because their mothers are malnourished.
- Child mortality rates are 8 times higher in Africa than Europe. Malnutrition is the main cause.
- 10.9 million children under 5 die in developing countries each year. Malnutrition causes 60% of the deaths.
- Cutting malnutrition among children aged under-5 in poor countries would reduce child mortality by 20%.

Sources: World Food Programme, <http://www.wfp.org/index.asp?section=1>; UNICEF report, 2004; FAO report, 2003

The norms of human dignity and the preferential option for the poor compel us to confront this issue with a sense of urgency. Dealing with poverty is not a luxury to which our nation can attend when it finds the time and resources. Rather, it is a moral imperative of the highest priority.

#170, *Economic Justice for All*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986

*The situation of a vast number of the world's children is far from being satisfactory, due to the lack of favourable conditions for their integral development . . . These are conditions connected with health care, or adequate food supply, little or no possibility of receiving a minimum or academic formation or inadequate shelter . . . It is essential to engage in a battle, at the national and international levels, against the violations of the dignity of boys and girls.*

#245, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, the Vatican, 2004



## People of Faith Respond to Hunger: SCIAF

*“The decision [to establish SCIAF] took place against the wider context of the second Vatican council(1962-65) which emphasised the necessity to “arouse the conscience of Catholics the world over to the needy people of the world”. At the same time as Vatican II the burgeoning mass media was helping to make people more aware of the plight of their brothers and sisters in poor countries overseas. For the first time, people were directly confronted -with the effects of war, drought, flood, famine and disease.” - SCIAF*

The Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF) is the official overseas development agency of the Catholic Church in Scotland. It supports programs for long-term change among the underprivileged regardless of race or religion in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; responds to short-term emergency situations; and campaigns for a more just world. SCIAF supports 80 partners in 20 countries and carries out education and campaign work in Scotland to address structures put in place by people that contribute to global inequality and poverty.

Source: [www.sciaf.com](http://www.sciaf.com)

### Campaign to End Hunger with SCIAF:

- **Groups, schools, churches and others** take part in SCIAF’s **24-Hour Fast**, a food fast that raises awareness about hunger and solidarity with the hungry as well as money for programs that address hunger. Go to SCIAF’s website for more information
- The Schools section of SCIAF’s website has **resources and fact sheets** on arms, debt, disasters, education, environment, famine, health, landmines, poverty, racism, refugees, and trade.
- SCIAF is joining with other organizations to **“Make Poverty History,”** a campaign in the UK focusing on more and better aid, trade justice, and dropping the debt. Over 100 organizations are involved, including CAFOD, OXFAM, and many others.
- Each year, SCIAF gives a **Global Citizenship Award** and 100 certificates to young people who are making a difference and working for social change. Examples of the inspiring efforts by recipients are posted on the website and their actions range from primary students asking for fair trade products to be sold in their school store to high school students lobbying representatives in government about child labor.
- **Give an alternative gift** with SCIAF, sending a vegetable garden, sheep, irrigation system, house-building material, schoolbooks, a refugee camp water source, and other real life gifts that can address basic needs.

Lord God, we know that combatting hunger means more than donating to charities. You call us to take action in identifying the root causes of the hunger that plagues so many innocent children in this world today. You call us to work for policy change and to educate others. Give us great compassion, God, and then help us to promote human development by addressing hunger and its causes.