

Statement Upon Introduction

"Helping Enhance the Livelihood of People (HELP) Around the Globe Commission Act"

By Rep. Frank R. Wolf

Women and children - the most innocent segment of our global community - comprise the majority of the poorest people in our world.

During my time in Congress, I have witnessed much of this suffering first hand in many of the world's poorest nations.

While the names of the suffering and the causes of their pain differ from place to place, they all share common experiences of horror and human tragedy. Genocide, murder, slavery, famine, HIV/AIDS and corruption. Limbless children bearing the scars of endless civil wars. Child soldiers forced to fight. Babies so malnourished that they cannot even cry out in hunger. Refugee camps crowded by young orphans, robbed of their parents and all alone. A continuing cycle of hunger, homelessness, poverty and pain.

America has been blessed with abundance. The Book of Luke in the Bible says, "To whom much is given, much is required." When the American people - who I believe are the most generous people in the world - see suffering, see hunger, see homelessness and poverty and pain - they want to help. When they see people who are hurting, they want to help. The American people will open their wallets and they will support giving their tax dollars to reach out to those in need.

That generosity has been the guiding principle of foreign assistance and humanitarian aid throughout our nation's history. I have no doubt whatsoever that generosity will continue.

That principle also has guided the mission of the dedicated employees of the U.S. Agency for International Development, now under the bold leadership of Administrator Andrew Natsios, and the dozens of non-governmental organizations and their volunteers, who reach out daily around the globe - from the deserts of Africa to the jungles of Central America to the rice fields of the Far East - to bring help to the poorest of the poor. I have seen the good work they do.

There is an expectation, however, that the assistance sent abroad is reaching those who truly need the help, that it is having a long-term impact on improving lives, and that it is being wisely spent.

I believe it is time to look at this issue with fresh eyes, assess our development and humanitarian assistance programs, both short- and long-term, evaluate who is receiving the assistance and how that assistance is provided, and determine if changes need to be made to allow the generosity of the American people to be felt throughout the world.

That is why I am introducing legislation - "Helping Enhance the Livelihood of People (HELP) Around the Globe Commission Act" - with the goal to help our nation do a better job of helping those who need it most. My bill will create a 21-member HELP Commission designed to bring the best foreign assistance minds together to focus on one primary question:

How can the United States improve its ability to quickly and effectively provide foreign assistance which is meeting not only short-term, immediate needs, but also has the long-term effect of making a difference in people's lives?

I want to be clear in stating my motivation for this commission. From my work and travels on humanitarian issues, I have the deepest respect for and admiration of the thousands of U.S. aid workers, both government employees and non-governmental organizations, who, often at personal risk, are reaching out to try and help improve the lives of suffering people in every corner of this world. That is why I am also asking the commission to look at how we can better secure our aid workers.

I believe this commission can help them do their jobs even better. Struggling nations face enormous obstacles to lasting development and political stability. It is critical that the international community continue to support and encourage struggling countries in their greatest hour of need. And we must find ways to improve our ability to do so.

The United States has a vital national interest - and I believe a moral obligation - to help poor nations so that they can provide their people with freedom, economic opportunity, functioning governments and most importantly - healthy and productive lives.

The HELP Commission also can find answers to other questions, such as:

Do we need a new vision to guide our foreign aid efforts?

Should we change the ratio between providing immediate humanitarian assistance and long-term assistance?

As those questions are pondered, we must be open enough to admit if and how previous policies have failed, and smart enough to expand upon our prior successes.

This panel must absorb the essence of our foreign assistance efforts and contemplate every aspect of our development, humanitarian and food aid programs, from the moment they are created to the moment the aid arrives on the ground.

The commissioners also must identify the root causes of a country's decline, or barriers to another country's accession, and recommend long-term strategies for ways our nation's aid can make the most successful impact.

Over the past 50 years, according to information provided by the Congressional Research Service, the United States has given a total of \$152.5 billion in development assistance

and food aid to countries and their people all over the world. Reports indicate that many aid recipients may be no better off today than they were decades ago.

I am asking this commission to also answer other questions:

Can we say with honesty that our efforts have left the majority of intended recipients better off?

While there are many success stories, are there better ways to do the job?

This commission will look at aid contributed all over the world from Central America to the Balkins, from Africa to Asia.

Take Sudan, for example. The United States gave \$1.7 billion in development and food aid to Sudan over the last 50 years. Just in the last 20 years, more than 2.2 million people in Sudan have died as a result of the ongoing civil war there. I have been to Sudan four times and have seen the suffering.

I have also been to Congo where the U.S. has sent \$724 million worth of development assistance and food aid over the last 50 years, and much more when you consider the cost of peacekeepers and even though we have tried to help more than 3.3 million innocent people have died in just the last five years.

Liberia is another example of a country with a long history of internal strife and instability yet they have continued to collect massive amounts of outside aid that directly benefitted the corrupt government. The United States gave \$929 million worth of development assistance aid to Liberia. And just look at the suffering taking place by the people of Liberia.

I have traveled to Ethiopia on two occasions, first in 1984 and again this past January, and over that span there remains little progress, if any, in land reform. Millions of people in Ethiopia are again at risk of starvation. This number is growing as millions more are on a "watch list" and in fear of starvation.

The high profile media coverage of the troubled relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea have made these nations the faces of famine, but the pain is not theirs alone. Across the continent of Africa 30 million people are at risk of starvation.

The United States has given \$2.4 billion worth of development and food aid to Ethiopia and \$233 million to Eritrea over the last 50 years. Yet there has been little land reform and little long-term development.

Hunger and poverty and lives of misery are not just problems in Africa. Look at Haiti. The United States gave Haiti \$1.3 billion in development and food aid over the last 50 years and is the largest bilateral donor but Haiti still struggles with poverty, hunger, illiteracy and AIDS.

Corrupt dictators across the globe have become rich off the generosity of the American people. U.S. citizens have the right to expect that their assistance is truly helping the poorest of the poor - women and children around the globe - and not extending the longevity of corrupt and murderous regimes.

President John F. Kennedy, in his inaugural address on January 20, 1961, spoke of America's mission to help the suffering people of the world. He said, "To those peoples in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required--not because the communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich."

While there is no question in my mind that providing development and humanitarian assistance is the right thing to do, we also have an obligation to make sure that aid is being provided in the right way.

America has always stepped up to the challenge to help the helpless around the globe.

The Helping Enhance the Livelihood of People Around the Globe Commission will look at which efforts have succeeded and which have failed, and why. We must be confident that American tax dollars aimed at helping women, children and the poor are being spent wisely and efficiently and are truly making a difference in the lives of people who, as President Kennedy said, "are struggling to break the bonds of mass misery."