

Dear Mr. President,

In the twilight of a momentous and unforgettable decade, we, as a nation, have endured innumerable hardships both as a sovereign country and as an international community. As citizens of the free United States, we are privileged to practice and to secure our unalienable liberties. Yet, into the dawn of a new decade, we must not neglect the adversity and severe poverty that less fortunate nations face. We have the responsibilities, not as parents, but as global neighbors to promote economic and political development while maintaining environmental sustainability.

As a political role model, Mr. President, and as Leader of the Free World, it is imperative that you and your administration demonstrate cooperation with foreign nations, which has been severely lacking in previous years. The United States, one of five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, affirms the principle of international fraternity. We assume obligations to humanity; we are integral in the elaborate dynamic of international policy. Therefore, to meet our ends, our country adopts myriad resolutions, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to redress the issues of poverty, human rights violations, and environmental degradation. Now, as 2015—the timetable goal for the MDGs—looms in the upcoming decade, we must devote additional resources to achieve these goals¹. As Secretary-General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, understands:

“We are entering an era of renewed multilateralism, a new era where the challenges facing humankind demand global common cause and uncommon global effort².”

Under the standards of poverty set by the World Bank (1.25 USD per day), 1.4 billion individuals are impoverished worldwide. Whereas this statistic remains dangerously high, it is equally essential to note that poverty also stems to issues such as illiteracy, poor sanitation,

epidemics, and breaches of peace. Nearly 11,500 people die each day from poverty-related diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria; two-thirds of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa³. Yet, even with the advent of innovative technology, humanitarian relief declines.

Relief, however, does not connote money. I do not advocate providing momentary funds for impoverished nations. I do not advocate propping up an artificial economy. Mr. President, I advocate a policy of sustainable agriculture: a three-part guideline of environmental stewardship, farm profitability, and prosperous farming communities.

Over the past two decades, investments and development assistance for agriculture has decreased by a substantial 14 percent. Production in the agricultural sector has been hindered, and food prices alone have pushed over 130 million people into poverty. In addition, 38 percent of the world's land surface has become inarable due to poor soil management practices. However, agriculture still remains the economic nexus of developing countries; for instance, it employs two-thirds of the population in sub-Saharan Africa⁴. Adopting and proliferating sustainable agriculture in third-world countries is the precedence necessary for effective global action.

The first keystone of sustainable agriculture, environmental stewardship, foment responsible treatment of the ecosystem and ecological resources. Economic development often couples with environmental degradation, as evident in the Industrial Revolution. However, sustainable agriculture eliminates the contentious dichotomy between economic progress and environmental protection. Indeed, sustainable agriculture exemplifies Goal Seven, *Ensure Environmental Sustainability*, of the MDGs¹. Organic farming methods, a branch of environmental stewardship, utilize modern technology and ecological education to maximize production with minimal resources. They include crop rotation, green manures and compost, and effective irrigation; countless nations warrant their success⁵. In the early 1980s, numerous rural

Indian villages transitioned from cultivating low-calorie, innutritious lentils to soil-beneficial, native grains. Hundreds of thousands of acres were saved from desertification. Simple education, facilitated by non-profit organizations, as demonstrated in the 1980s, taps into the immense potential of developing nations. In fact, crop rotation yields 60 to 80 percent more arable land, reducing energy consumption and pollution, bio-diversifying insect, bird, and flora populations⁶. Legislating judicious measures such as crop rotation on a federal and international scale is the proactive and simple solution to an environmental crisis.

The economic aspect of sustainable agriculture, farm profitability, addresses scarcity within developing countries. Poverty remains the most pressing issue in foreign policy; it extends to all spheres such as terror and political instability. If poverty obstructs most, if not all eight, objectives of the MDGs, then we, as an affluent nation, have the moral imperative to end it¹. However, the status quo ineffectively combats poverty, overlooking its root causes. Past and current endeavors clothe poverty in greenbacks and IOUs. Results are meager, however. Despite 568 billion dollars of aid allocated to the continent of Africa, Africans are poorer now than 25 years ago⁷. The solution to poverty is not aid; it is trade. The World Trade Organization (WTO) reports:

“Trade openness is...central to the remarkable growth of developed countries since the mid-20th century, and an important factor behind the poverty alleviation experienced in most of the developing world since the early 1990s⁸.”

As agriculture accounts for one-third of the GDP in sub-Saharan Africa, short- and long-term investments in horticulture development and trade stimulate the dying economies of third-world nations⁴. The WTO estimates that growth in agriculture is twice as successful in reducing poverty as growth in other sectors. In addition, improving farmers' access to regional markets is

fundamental, since it expands infrastructure for effective trade. Indeed, plant propagation and crop surplus lay the economic basis for self-sufficiency—a vital element of United States foreign policy.

In the midst of a rapidly globalizing world, prosperous farming communities, the final aspect of sustainable agriculture, foster social stability. Food shortages lead to flagrant breaches of peace, as apparent in the 2008 Haitian food riots which escalated into temporary anarchy⁹. With rising global food prices and expanding inarable land, events such as food riots are precursors to a distressing future. Now, more than any other decade, we must fulfill our commitments to ensure social justice: gender equality, primary education, and low mortality rates¹. Agriculture is central in a society's treatment of human rights. In fact, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN approximates that women are responsible for up to 80 percent of food in developing countries. However, most governments only provide five percent of agricultural extension services—information, training, and supplies for farmers—to women. Expanding the role of agriculture is essential for gender equality, as it establishes land and property rights for otherwise disenfranchised women. Moreover, education, especially for young girls, is a vital component in agriculture. Primary schooling for females increases agricultural output by 24 percent, lessens mortality rates, and improves household health¹⁰. For many countries on the brink of social and political unrest, promoting agricultural communities mitigates the risk that these nations pose to the United States, the international community, and most importantly, their own citizens.

I, a self-proclaimed idealist, firmly believe that our nation not only has the resources and resolve to embark upon, but also to succeed in, this endeavor—an international effort to alleviate global poverty. As our nation nears the conclusion of the MDGs, we must forever keep in mind

that these goals are merely branches of a greater, more significant pledge—the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet, if “all human beings are created free and equal,” then why are there are more people enslaved now than at any other period in human history¹¹? If “everyone has the right to education,” then why is it regarded as optimistic when *only* 72 million children cannot attend school? If “everyone has the right to...well-being of himself and of his family,” then why have 420 people died from starvation since you started reading this letter³? I understand that sustainable agriculture is not the sole solution to our world’s problems. However, it is a stride toward where we ought to be. Eleanor Roosevelt, the champion of human rights, once voiced:

“Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world...Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere¹².”

Mr. President, my home cannot be seen on any map, but I support human rights. The White House, however, can be seen on every map. Will you support human rights?

Sincerely,

Johnny Huynh

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