Good evening. I am honored to be invited by a group of distinguished Californians who not only care deeply about the world beyond the United States – but are dedicated to making a difference there too.

I am here tonight to speak to you on whether we are ‘losing the battle against world hunger.’ Let me set out by saying that I am an optimist by nature – and it goes hard against the grain to talk of suffering a ‘loss’ of such magnitude. But as head of the world’s largest humanitarian organization, the World Food Programme – feeding upwards of 100 million hungry people a year – I would have to say that we are losing ground. After decades of progress, it is reasonable to ask why.
The challenge
I’d like to define the scope of the challenge of world hunger for you tonight – and then I want to talk about why and how we can all win that war in the 21st century.

Let me start off with the African country of Niger – a place that is very much on our minds and in our hearts these days. Niger is also a striking and bitter example of our collective failure to seriously and systematically confront the pressing issues of hunger and poverty.

Until a few weeks ago – when Niger’s terrible misfortunes began to parade across our TV screens – the country was a virtual ‘unknown’ to most of us. Vast in size - Niger is twice the size of Texas – its 11 million inhabitants are about the poorest on earth; only war-wracked Sierra Leone to the West holds the lead in poverty. Most Nigeriens live on a dollar a day – or less.

Forty percent of Niger’s children are underfed – a common thread that runs throughout Africa, by the way – and one out of four dies before turning 5 years old.

And that’s when things are normal.

Now, add severe drought and the country’s worst plague of locusts in 15 years to that already bleak scenario. Combine it with an extra layer of international indifference – because Niger is not possessed of any particular strategic or material value. There is no violence to attract political or media
attention. And you wind up with the harrowing, heart-rending images of starving children that we all have seen.

You should know that Americans have responded generously (latest figures) – as they historically have done when moved by a horrific human tragedy of this kind – and the donations are now flowing in a way that will surely save many lives that may otherwise have been lost. (The US government …. ). We are quickly gaining the capacity to reach 2.5 million of the worst-affected people in Niger with emergency food rations before the rainy season, and all its complications, arrive in two months’ time.

But while I rejoice in the knowledge that lives will be saved, I am profoundly disturbed by the reality that for many of the people of Niger – especially the youngest and most vulnerable – it is way too late.

**When CNN arrives too late**

Ladies and gentlemen, we simply cannot wait until our televisions beam these devastating images into our living rooms to take action. When the warning bell is sounded about imminent disaster – as the World Food Program did in Niger as far back as last November – we must listen, and act.

For this collective failure comes at a high cost.

The first cost, of course, is in lives. There is the spiritual and moral price. No child in the world today – a world where food is cheaper and more plentiful than ever - should die from hunger. I think that is a moral bottom line that we can all agree on.
But to put a different face on this discussion, there is a high material cost as well. When we are obliged to rush in – as we are doing now – to save lives because resources failed to flow earlier, the costs of logistics go way up. Further, because so many Nigeriens have sold off all their precious assets – like cattle – to keep their families alive, there will be significant added costs of replenishing their lives and assets to get them back on their feet. Recently the Ambassador of Mali – which has also been hit hard by the same drought and locust plague that is affecting Niger -- visited WFP headquarters. He described how a last year, a straggly cow could fetch more than $500 on the market. Today, herders are lucky if they can sell a beast for $5. To save money and lives, we must spend money today to develop poor countries so they can withstand the shocks of nature without heading over the precipice each time.

Prevention, my friends, does indeed pay in the end.

**A hungry man is an angry man**

There is also a very important but often ignored cost to ignoring the warning signs of the many disasters-in-the-making around the developing world: the erosion of our peace and security.

We have heard many discussions about whether or not poverty breeds terrorism in the days since 9/11. Many experts say that the hungry poor – struggling as they are to scrape together one meal a day for their children – are simply too weak and downtrodden to contemplate terrorist activity. They may be right. And Niger would be a case in point: while it is 90 percent
Muslim and wretchedly poor, its brand of Islam is overwhelmingly tolerant, and there has been very little reported extremist or terrorist activity. This in spite of being encircled by tough neighbors like Nigeria, Libya, Chad and Algeria, where terrorist and anti-American activity, as well as religious and political extremism, are common.

And yet there’s no denying the link between poverty and instability. It is also true that extremism of any kind thrives best in failed and failing states where poverty and chaos reign. We need look no farther than Afghanistan or Somalia to paint the other side of this picture. Even WFP’s humanitarian operations are often the target of attacks in these countries. A boat carrying food for Somalia has been hijacked off the coast of Kenya. Mortars have been fired at our bases in Afghanistan more than once. We ignore poverty and hunger at our risk.

One example illustrates this very well: the October 1992 earthquake in Egypt, which killed more than 500 people and unleashed a variety of social and political pressures linked to Islamic fundamentalism. The government’s rescue efforts were mired in red tape and confusion. But Islamic groups rushed in with food, blankets and medicine, consolidating the strong presence they already have in Egypt’s poorest neighborhoods.

I think you can see the huge potential cost of ignoring the realities of hunger and poverty here. But there is also an opportunity out there for America – whose reputation is suffering in the world, as you in this audience well know. But even as cosmopolitan an audience as this might be taken aback by the depth of hostility to the United States now rampant in so many countries.
Scrawled all over the buildings where I live in Rome is vile anti-American graffiti. The situation is not much different elsewhere in Europe. And in the Arab and Muslim world, it is much worse. There is a lot of work to do to turn this situation around.

Iraq, of course, is the main reason – though we hope the transfer of sovereignty will improve matters. But beyond Iraq is the indisputable fact that despite the valiant efforts of thousands of American individuals and organizations, the world – or at least a good part of it – no longer thinks of the United States as its humanitarian leader. It has lost its image as a nation committed to seizing the lead on issues like poverty, illiteracy and hunger.

So while we may sometimes feel powerless against the challenges of Iraq and the Middle East, there is actually an opportunity for America – and Americans - to regain our leadership in the humanitarian arena. And that’s something all of us can do something about.

**Children must come first**

Where to start? We need to start with hunger – especially child hunger. For it is not just a moral bottom line as we have seen – that no child should die of hunger in today’s world. Hunger is also a bottom line for just about any of the crucial battles we have going in the poor world today. President Bush has demonstrated his very clear personal interest in this issue, and we have talked about it at length. Yes, we need development – we need to conquer HIV/AIDS and other deadly diseases – we need to ensure that every child gets a shot at education, the cornerstone of individual and national development.
But not one of those worthy goals, ladies and gentlemen, can be met on an empty stomach.

I must warn you here that the scope and magnitude of hunger in the world today is overwhelming – and these facts and figures I present may surprise and shock you.

For each and every day, 365 days a year, hunger crushes 25,000 lives – most of them children. In fact, one child dies of hunger and related ailments every five seconds, all day long. The headline in today’s *San Francisco Chronicle* could read “Forty-five 747s full of children crashed today” because that is the number of children whose lives will be lost because of hunger.

This largely invisible force amasses the dead like no other – killing more people each year than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis together. Hunger and related diseases kill two people for every one who dies from smoking. The World Health Organization (WHO) calls hunger the top threat to public health in the world today; it also robs the world of more productive life years than any other health factor.

Even when it doesn’t kill, hunger robs children and adults alike of vitality and strength – profoundly handicapping the development of poor countries. In some nations, this silent force stunts the mental and physical development of more than half its children. It keeps children out of school – and mired in poverty.
It burdens the lives and futures of some 300 million children a year – more than the population of the United States.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization or FAO, our sister agency, estimates that 852 million today – most of them women and children - are chronically hungry. And in a world where food is cheaper and more abundant than ever.

Ironically, only 8 percent of those hunger deaths happen in the huge humanitarian emergencies that you all read about or see on TV – like the Asian tsunami. The large majority – 92 percent of those 10 million lives lost each year – die because of absolute poverty and chronic hunger. Quietly fading away in remote corners of the world that typically escape the notice of the public and the media – in places we at WFP call “the forgotten emergencies.” That’s a long list that until just a few weeks ago included Niger. These are the hungry poor - and they are dying in unconscionable numbers.

Hunger has become practically invisible in the developed world, because most of us rarely encounter true, absolute hunger face to face.

The statistics are so huge and overwhelming: who can conceive of 25,000 lives lost in a day to hunger? Even for someone in the aid business, as I am, the numbers are hard to fathom. It would be like losing the entire audience at San Francisco’s Monster Park – 70,000 people - every three days. Each and every day this enormous silent slaughter takes place. And yet we hear no
loud public outcry. Few noisy pickets outside Congress. Few angry letters to the editor. Few debates on the TV talk shows …

Yet when we do see the terrible face of hunger on our television screens, it is usually that of a child. And it is through the eyes of a hungry child that we can best understand the incredibly debilitating nature of hunger – its erosion of a child’s body, mind, and perhaps most tragically: future.

So let us step back from these huge, mind-reeling statistics and narrow the lens for a minute – onto a child. Bear in mind that one in four children under age 5 in the world today is underweight due to malnutrition.

**The inheritance of hunger**

Think about this sadly typical scenario: in a poor country, a female child – let’s call her Hana - is born already malnourished and underweight. Hana is behind the curve even as she launches out into this world. She will grow up eating less nutritious food – often especially because she is female – and will eat last from the family table. Hana will have little access to healthcare and – again a prisoner of her gender! – even less chance at education than her brothers. This girl will grow up to be an underweight and malnourished adult – giving birth accordingly.

Hana’s children will grow up the same way: poorly nourished, poorly educated.

And so the grim cycle continues for Hana, her children, her country.
But I am here to give you the broad picture about world hunger and what’s being done to fight it. So I will widen the lens again to encompass not just Hana -- but all the world’s chronically malnourished – for their ranks are growing astronomically, by something like 10 million a year. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that for those of us in the business of feeding the hungry – we are facing a real crisis.

**Donations drop while the number of hungry increases**
After a relative decline in the early 1990s, the numbers of chronically hungry began to rise again. In the early 1990s, FAO reported there were 792 million hungry people. Last year, they reported that the number had risen to 852 million. Oddly enough, the growth in chronic hunger occurred in a decade that also saw a 20 percent reduction in poverty; clearly progress on poverty and hunger do not go hand in hand.

The number and scope of humanitarian emergencies also has been on the rise, from an average of 15 per year during the 1980s to more than 30 a year since the turn of the millennium. Natural disasters and conflict have skyrocketed in the past decade: droughts, floods, earthquakes - the tsunami, hurricanes and of course war. In Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, etc. Poor governance also keeps people locked in hunger and poverty – in places like North Korea and Zimbabwe. The list goes on and on.

Tragically, the world’s foreign assistance has not kept pace: global food aid continues to drop – plunging by 30 percent last year, from 10.3 million tons in 2003 to 7.5 million tons in 2004.
This latest fall is part of a general decline in food aid volume since 1999, when 15 million tons of food aid – or twice as much as last year - were delivered.

What has prompted this precipitous drop in food aid? Somewhat higher prices for cereal and record transport costs are certainly the major factors. But there is one thing that did not cause the drop and that is the food supply – which is healthier than ever. In fact, the FAO says there was record output of cereals worldwide in 2004 – and global cereal production for 2005 is expected to come in at around 1.9 (B) billion tons – just slightly below last year’s record crop.

What else threatens food aid? We at WFP are worried that ongoing discussions in the World Trade Organization (WTO) about imposing new “disciplines” on food aid could trigger a further decline. While WFP does not oppose disciplines that would make food aid more effective – rigorous needs assessments, careful targeting and monitoring – these steps should not come at the expense of delivering food to those in need. The simple truth is that food aid commitments and deliveries are nose-diving while WTO is discussing their discipline. And the world’s hungry children are paying the price.

Total aid spending from donor governments has never been higher. But aid for agricultural development - the key to ending the cycles of food crises developing countries – has gone from 12 to just 4 percent of Official Development Assistance. And without real money for development – we
will never get to the productive societies – the healthy and educated societies – that ultimately will lead them on the road to prosperity … and away from the need for food aid.

Unfortunately, the bad news doesn’t stop here.

As if poverty and hunger weren’t enough, the global HIV/AIDS pandemic is threatening to undermine even the hard-won gains of many poor countries struggling valiantly to overcome these handicaps– especially in Africa. And AIDS has added a new and sinister element to the dynamics of hunger.

Although there are indeed pockets of hope in Africa - the statistics from the sub-Saharan part of the continent remain gloomy. To cite just a few of the most striking figures:

- 40 percent of all Africans live – or maybe the better word is “survive” - on less than a dollar a day
- 200 million Africans are threatened by serious food shortages
- AIDS kills more than 2 million Africans each year – the highest toll in the world

Let’s take southern Africa, where for the most part, countries have worked hard since the apartheid era to create stable, tolerant governments – make peace - and open economies.

You probably haven’t read much about it, but the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world today is not in Darfur, Afghanistan or North Korea; it is
the gradual, HIV/AIDS-driven disintegration of the social structures in southern Africa – and hunger is playing a critical part. To cite just a few examples from southern Africa:

- The AIDS epidemic is decimating the ranks of teachers, doctors and nurses faster than they can train replacements;
- More than 7 million farmers in southern Africa have died of AIDS in the past two decades – more than the entire, on-the-farm population in the US and Canada combined - creating a new cause of food insecurity even when weather patterns are favorable;
- By 2010, statistics indicate one in every five children will be an AIDS orphan;
- In at least four southern African countries – life expectancy has plunged by an average of 20 years –In Swaziland, life expectancy is now just 36 years …. Not since the Middle Ages have we seen lifespans so short.
- Broaden the lens again to all of sub-Saharan Africa, where there are currently an estimated 12 million AIDS orphans. In just five years time, that total is projected to reach **20 million AIDS orphans**.

What does their future hold? What does that mean for the future viability – and stability – of these societies?

What is their future in a world where the parameters keep shifting against its poorest citizens?
We are also reeling from new reports warning of yet another global trend that will hobble those trying to escape the hunger and poverty trap: climate change.

UN scientists warn that one in six countries this year face food shortages due to severe droughts that could become semi-permanent because of climate change. These droughts that have devastated crops across Africa, central America and southeast Asia in the past year are part of an emerging pattern that will only get worse. Africa, especially southern Africa, is singled out for special concern – not just for climate change but its offspring - increasing desertification.

Parts of Europe and the Mid-West of the United States have been hit hard by drought recently. While the situation is bad, we know that communities in the US and Europe can for the most part make it through the tough times by importing food. In Japan and the southern states of the US, communities are regularly hit by massive storms and hurricanes that destroy homes and businesses. But with state and private insurance, the people affected pull through. That’s not the case for most poor people in Africa and other developing countries. We’re actually piloting a scheme in Ethiopia and Mali which will see if WFP can provide effective insurance protection for people at risk of drought, based on reliable rainfall data.

**What can be done?**

I know I have painted a very bleak picture today. But let us shift gears to what is being done, and what can be done, to conquer this terrible scourge of hunger in the world.
First, what is WFP doing about it?

WFP, the World Food Program, was created four decades ago to fight hunger. It remains on the front lines, as the largest and most far-reaching humanitarian agency in the world today. In 2004, we reached 113 million people in 80 countries worldwide – often in the most remote and inaccessible corners of the world.

We move food to people who need it - and we move it fast. By whatever means it takes: by air drop or donkey, by boat or truck. Every single day, WFP has 20 aircraft in the skies, 40 ships on the high seas and 5,000 trucks on the roads; all of them carrying food to those in need. Over the past four decades, we have fed more than a billion of the poorest people on the planet.

The scope of our operations can be enormous: In June of 2003, for example, WFP fed every Iraqi citizen – or 27 million people – moving 1000 tons of food each hour, 24/7.

More recently, we responded instantly – and massively - to the needs of the Asian tsunami victims. Since WFP was already operating in the region, we were able to gear up right away – launching the drive to feed people on the ground within 24 hours of the tsunami. We were named the lead logistics agency there.

While we’re on logistics – I’d like to point out to the educators and parents among you that we have a wonderful tool to teach kids about the logistics of
food aid: it’s called Food Force and it’s an educational video game aimed at teaching kids aged 8 to 13 about hunger in the world and the business of fighting hunger. It’s fun for kids – and a great entry tool for the issue of world hunger. It’s been downloaded some 1.7 million times since its launch a few months ago and is available for free at: www.food-force.com

Another key plank of WFP’s fight against hunger is our school feeding program. Last year, we reached more than 16 million children that way in schools all over the world.

This is a program that in my view comes as close to a “magic bullet” as any in the development field. Let me illustrate its potential by returning to our young “Hana” – and painting a very different scenario: one where she had access to an education.

First, how to get her in school at all? Her family needs her: to do important tasks to help keep the family afloat including fetching water – often from water sources miles away, cooking, minding the younger children, tending the family goats. WFP has found that offering a meal at school acts as a powerful lure for families to send their kids – including girls – to school. As an extra incentive, we often offer take-home rations for the girls – say of cooking oil. That increases status of the female child and often allows her to stay in school, once there.

Even five years at school can dramatically alter Hana’s future. Time and experience have proven that, with the bare bones of an education, she will marry later – more like 20 instead of 12 or 13 - and have fewer children:
better educated children, healthier children. Her horizons will broaden: she may find other ways to work or farm, and increase her family’s income. Multiply Hana millions of times over to the country level – and you can imagine what a dramatic impact this program could have on the world were all our “Hana”s so privileged!

I cannot over-stress the importance of programs like school feeding – whether run by WFP or some other agency – although school feeding programs remain terribly under-funded throughout the world. And the cost of feeding a child at school is spectacularly modest for such potentially far-reaching effects: just 19 cents a day – or $34 a day.

In the African context, where poverty keeps some 40 million children out of school – school feeding is critical. In southern Africa, hardest hit by HIV/AIDS, it is vital to the future of those countries. There, the need for survival outstrips the possibility of a childhood – or an education. Children barely old enough to baby-sit are running households, taking care of younger siblings and searching for means to provide food and water. For many, it seems as if there is no time for education, and yet without it, the vicious downward spiral of HIV/AIDS, hunger and poverty will only accelerate.

Schools in southern Africa also provide a springboard for sharing HIV awareness education. And education is the only “vaccine” we have against HIV/AIDS: the level of education has been linked to a decline in new HIV infections - particularly among secondary school girls. Girls must stay in school – to learn, make better life choices and live longer.
There is good news in the fight against AIDS in Africa – the expanded reach of anti-retroviral drugs. But again, food interventions are also critical. By providing food support to undernourished individuals and families, WFP seeks to both facilitate the complex drug regimens, as well as keep the families together and afloat. Yet while food is vital, it is generally overlooked in funding of Africa’s anti-AIDS programs.

So if WFP can feed entire countries, in the throes of the worst emergencies – or in the most inaccessible parts of the world - why are we losing ground in the war on hunger?

Simply put: we need help. We are committed to getting the food to people who need it in as timely a manner as possible. But we cannot do our job in a vacuum.

**No one can win the war on hunger alone**

WFP is committed to partnerships – with our donors, with the food industry, with food processors and shippers, with host-recipient governments, and with the operational and technical folks on the ground – NGOs (non-governmental organizations or private charities for laypeople), other UN agencies, universities, think tanks, organizations like yours – and with individuals.

This is where you come in.

We live in the country that gives most generously to WFP: for the past several years, the US government has given an average of 1 billion dollars a year to support our work on humanitarian emergencies – most of it “in kind”
donations of food. Beyond government, the average American ranks among the world’s most generous. We have only to look to the tsunami, which generated a record-breaking billion-dollars-plus – or about $3.50 per capita - from the private sector. The Indiana-based Center on Philanthropy says there has been no comparable outpouring of private funds since they began tracking charitable donations 50 years ago:

One in three American households donated funds to the tsunami victims.

What could we do with that kind of money? An incredible amount. To cite just one example, our school feeding experts believe we could feed 50 million kids by 2007 on a budget of approximately $700 million.

But we aren’t there yet.

As noted earlier, the scale and scope of humanitarian emergencies are increasing every year – and donor funds, from any country, are not keeping pace. Fact is, in our era of unprecedented wealth and prosperity, we are simply not reaching many of the neediest and the UN Millennium Goal of cutting the proportion of the hungry in half by 2015 seems increasingly elusive.

Eliminating poverty and hunger is the number one target of the Millennium Development Goals – endorsed not only by the UN but by the leaders of all of our countries. Poverty has been reduced in many developing countries; and with regard to hunger, WFP can testify that it has “graduated” many of
them from the ranks of food aid recipients: China is the most recent in a list that also includes the Philippines, Brazil and Mexico.

And yet, five years after the Summit that proclaimed those noble goals – we are badly lagging. The second Millennium goal – achieving universal primary education – will also not be achieved until children get enough to eat.

We have learned the hard way that hungry children cannot learn effectively. Poor children are also kept out of school to find work or food for their families. You cannot develop countries without education; you cannot educate on an empty belly. As the president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, recently remarked: “We have a saying in my country: when you take hunger out of poverty, poverty is halved.”

The good news here is that together, we really can do it. Feeding the hungry is do-able. The food, the means, the technology, are all there. But getting it done will require a tremendous shift – a sea change – in political momentum and will to make it happen.

Of course, I would be remiss not to note the recent and welcome news from last month’s “G-8” Summit of leading industrialized nations – which did indeed put Africa high up on their common agenda, even while operating under the terrible shadow of terrorism. British Prime Minister Tony Blair has been adamant in pushing for major increases in foreign aid to Africa. Both he and President Bush convinced fellow leaders to step up pledges to
Africa through 2010 and to offer debt relief to 18 countries – including Niger.

But while the Summit represented a milestone in terms of attitude and approach toward Africa, debt relief is unlikely to seriously alter the plight of the world’s most hungry. For these are people who are largely economic bystanders, with no stake and no role to play in either their national or the global economy.

Essentially, we have created a world “underclass” of the hungry. Their numbers are rising and their chances of catching up to the rest of us grow more remote with each day. We need to act now to reverse that trend. It is in all of our interests.

What can you, as a community, do to help?

Get involved. Many people from around the country have spontaneously launched fundraisers – often for our 19-cents-a-day program, the one that supports school-feeding – or organized a local edition of our annual “Fight Hunger: Walk the World” event – which this year drew more than 200,000 walkers in each of the world’s 24 time zones.

Raise awareness: it’s not all about money. Teachers can incorporate our teaching materials or Food Force into curriculums. Speak out. Write your congressperson or senator. Write an oped for your local paper. Talk to your neighbor or co-worker.
Ladies and gentlemen, there are few things that are so unnecessary as child hunger – or so wasteful as unexplored intelligence. School feeding programs are one way to address both at once. If we can find the resolve and the resources, we can eliminate these features from the human landscape in a single generation.

I’d like to quote the words of one delegate to the recent convention of the School Nutrition Association – which provides meals for American schoolchildren:

“Peace begins when the hungry are fed … the future begins when the hungry are educated.”

Thank you!