

Speech by Schuyler Thorup, Executive Vice President, Overseas Operations, CRS-INC2016

Welcome to Nairobi. It's really wonderful to look out and see so many familiar faces. I'm thrilled that all of you could join us here to explore the critical role and potential of the private sector in ensuring nutrition for all. I could be mistaken, but I doubt that there's a single parent or caregiver in this room who has held an infant or toddler in his or her arms and not felt that fervent desire to ensure that child's access to the critical building blocks of his/her God-given potential. While many and varied, the first of these building blocks is nutrition.

In spite of the many advances in the field of nutrition during the past decade and unprecedented levels of governmental commitments, there are still tragically over 150 million undernourished children in the world. Think of that. If each of those children were placed shoulder to shoulder, they would reach all the way the moon and back... four times. It's hard to wrap your head around a number like that, but the cost for each of those children is abundantly clear.

When kids don't get the right nutrition, their bodies and their brains are equally affected. They're less active, more prone to illness, with cumulative impacts on their physical health and mental development which are irreversible and devastating for their families and communities. Solutions to these issues are complex and require collaborative, multi-sectoral and integrated efforts. That's why we're here today. We're here to push the dialogue we started last year by focusing on how the private sector can contribute to ending malnutrition. We're doing so because we know that to truly eliminate malnutrition, we'll need strong and diverse partnerships, which leverage our respective strengths and resources to scale sustainable, cost-effective solutions.

Over the next three days, we'll hear about many such partnerships such as BUSH PROOF in Madagascar that is working to improve water sources so children have less exposure to water-borne diseases. We'll hear from a Kenyan company called "Sweet and Dried" that's working on safely drying fruit and vegetables so that children can have year-round access to a variety of nutritious foods. And from Guatemala, we'll hear about how the government brought donors and the private sector together to produce a simple, but effective measured feeding bowl that helps ensure children get the right amount of food.

It's through these kinds of creative partnerships that we are strongest, as each stakeholder brings its own contributions to bear. The private sector brings innovation, reach, and businesses processes that work. Governments set the agenda and safeguard the public good through their policy and regulatory functions. Donors provide critical resources to share risks, develop and test solutions, and catalyze scale. And finally, members of the faith communities and broader civil society actors play a critical role in raising their collective voices and efforts to sustain proven social service programs, targeting those poorest and most marginalized members of our societies.

Last year, we said that to achieve nutrition security, there must be a convergence of evidence-based solutions and political will. With the approval of the Sustainable Development Goals in November 2015, the clock is now ticking with a strong political commitment to eradicate child malnutrition by 2030. We can do this! We're confident that this conference will provide each of you with an excellent opportunity to engage, to share your energy, your ideas and your experiences with each other so that together, we can find the enduring cost-effective solutions to close the dark chapter of child malnutrition for this and future generations.

On behalf of all of my colleagues at Catholic Relief Services, I thank you for being here.