

## **The World Food Crisis**

*The Amherst Unitarian Universalist Newsletter*

June 2008.

*Social Justice Spotlight is an opinion column written by individual Social Justice Committee members. This month's Social Justice Spotlight comes to us from **Alison Curphey**.*

An unrelenting food crisis is sweeping the globe, threatening to plunge nearly 100 million people into absolute poverty and suffering. Spiraling food prices are leading to violent social and political unrest worldwide, as the hungry lash out at their governments in protest. And even here in the United States, we are not exempt from the impact — the Department of Agriculture is forecasting that all food prices will rise another five percent this year\*, and costs will rise for toys, clothes and other goods made in countries, like China, that are experiencing food price inflation.

Historically, food crises have been localized: the harvest fails in a particular region and the burden falls heavily on the poorest citizens. Today, however, food prices are soaring in many countries simultaneously. And, it is not only the world's poor who are suffering; the working and middle classes are being hard hit, too.

Some recent civil strife illustrates the global scale of this crisis:

In Haiti, hungry protesters forced the prime minister to resign;

Egypt's president ordered the army to start baking bread as rising food prices ignited anger that threatens the government;

Upwards of 70,000 people took to the streets of Mexico in "tortilla riots" to protest an increase in the price of corn flour by 400 percent;

The Philippines made hoarding rice punishable by life imprisonment;

In parts of sub-Saharan Africa, unprecedented food riots are flaring;

In Malaysia, the ruling coalition was nearly ousted by voters citing food and fuel price inflation as the cause, and their political control is still jeopardized; and

In Senegal, police in riot gear beat and used tear gas against people protesting high food prices.

In 2007, wheat prices rose 77 percent and rice prices rose 16 percent. This year, since January, rice prices have soared 141 percent.\*\* These are some of the sharpest spikes in food prices ever. As a result, working and middle classes in poor countries are being forced to choose between health care and three meals a day, between school for their children and food for dinner. The middle class is cutting back on meat so that they can still afford vegetables and rice. The moderately poor are cutting back on meat and vegetables so that they can still purchase rice. The poor are cutting back on meat, vegetables, and up to two meals a day so that they can still afford one bowl of grain. And the desperate are facing disaster.

In the end, the face of hunger is not prices, not politics, not protest. It's people. It's Placide Simone, an Haitian 29-year old mother of five who offered one of her starving children to a stranger. "Take one," she said. "You pick. Just feed them."

To help, please stay tuned as members of our congregation organize activities to raise awareness, generate discussion and lend a hand in solving this problem. To join in planning these activities, please contact me, **Alison Curphey**. If you are moved to help immediately, please consider donating to one of the following organizations:

United Nations World Food Program, [www.wfp.org/how\\_to\\_help/introduction](http://www.wfp.org/how_to_help/introduction)

Oxfam International, [www.oxfam.org/en/](http://www.oxfam.org/en/)

CARE, [www.care.org/campaigns/world-hunger/](http://www.care.org/campaigns/world-hunger/)

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\*NPR, "Tell Me More," April 22, 2008.

\* \**The Economist*, April 19th-25th, 2008.