

Hunger Banquet script

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the ONE Campaign Hunger Banquet. We are here today because more than 1 billion people live in extreme poverty.

[PAUSE]

850 million people suffer from chronic hunger.

[PAUSE]

A child dies from hunger or a preventable disease every 2.9 seconds. That's 30,000 children a day.

[PAUSE]

You may think hunger is about too many people and too little food. That is not the case. Our rich and bountiful planet produces enough food to feed every woman, man, and child on earth.

Hunger is about power. Its roots lie in inequalities in access to education and resources. The results are illiteracy, poverty, war, and the inability of families to grow or buy food. Today, you join ONE's fight against hunger. ONE believes that human rights are not contingent on our country of origin, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or the money we have or need. Rather, human rights are fundamental and nonnegotiable.

While the proportion of the world's population living in hunger has decreased, hunger endures for millions of people. In 46 countries, people are poorer today than they were in 1990.

Your presence here today shows that you are concerned. You want to learn more. You want to make a difference.

We continue to promote change "from the bottom up" through hundreds of grassroots organizations around the world. We believe that people have the power, the right, and the understanding to create solutions for their own communities.

The ONE Campaign is supported by over 70 anti-poverty and development groups. The community work of these organization's forms the basis for our policy and advocacy work, through which we challenge the national and international laws and policies that reinforce poverty. We also educate the US public on hunger and poverty issues, which is what this Hunger Banquet is all about.

The Hunger Banquet is a metaphor for how food and other resources are inequitably distributed in the world. As such, we can only touch upon the issues. We cannot recreate the many complex ways poverty manifests itself. We will not have time to go into all the problems associated with lack of access to health care, education, and employment opportunities, and the realities of the day-to-day struggle for survival.

The one thing I would like you to remember is this: Everyone on earth has the same basic needs; it is only our circumstances—where we live and the culture into which we are born—that differ.

Some are born into relative prosperity and security, while millions—through no choice of their own—are born into poverty.

As each of us walked in the door here today, we drew our lot, at random. Look around, and you can see that equality and balance don't exist here.

Please note: No one section of this room represents a single country. While the US is one of the wealthiest countries on earth, almost 36 million Americans live in poverty. Stark inequalities prevail everywhere.

Now I would like to introduce you to the three segments of this world. But remember—it's too easy to measure this world purely in economic terms. It is really about each person's ability to achieve a sense of security and to access resources.

[MOVE NEAR HIGH-INCOME GROUP]

If you are sitting over here, you represent the 15 percent of the world's population with a per capita income of \$9,076 or more. You are fortunate enough to be able to afford a nutritious daily diet. Since many of you exceed your daily requirement of calories, you are likely to face health problems such as heart disease and diabetes. But most of you don't worry about getting health care. You have access to the best medical care in the world. It's a given that your children will attend school; the only uncertainty is how many years they will study after high school. Access to credit? You turn down more offers than you can count. You and your family live in a comfortable and secure home. You own at least one car and probably two televisions. When you take your annual two-week vacation, you don't worry about your job disappearing in your absence.

You have access to virtually everything you need and the security to enjoy it.

[MOVE NEAR MIDDLE-INCOME GROUP]

If you are sitting here, you represent roughly 25 percent of the world's population. You earn between \$912 and \$9,075 a year. The levels of access and security you enjoy vary greatly. You live on the edge. For many, it would take losing only one harvest to drought or a serious illness to throw you into poverty. You probably own no land and may work as a day laborer, a job that pays a paltry amount—but it's better than nothing. Your small income allows for some use of electricity and a few years of schooling for your children—especially if they are boys. Alternatively, you may have left your family to go work in the city. You hope that the money you earn from your less-than-minimum-wage job as domestic help or a sweatshop worker will eventually allow you to move back home and make a better life for your family.

[MOVE NEAR LOW-INCOME GROUP]

If you are sitting on the floor, you represent the majority of the world's population—roughly 60 percent. Your average income is less than \$911 a year—about \$2.50 a day—although many of you earn much less. Every day is a struggle to meet your family's basic needs. Finding food, water, and shelter can consume your entire day. For many of you women, it would not be uncommon to have to walk five to 10 miles every day to get water, spend several more hours working in the fields, and of course, take care of the children. Many of you are frequently hungry. It is quite likely that you don't get the minimum number of calories your hardworking life requires. Many of you are homeless or living in structures so flimsy that a hard rain or strong wind could cause a major catastrophe. Even though education is the single most powerful weapon against poverty, school is a luxury few of your children will ever experience. Most girls don't even bother to dream about school. Adequate health care is out of the question for many of you in this group. For most of you, early death is all too familiar, with many mothers expecting to lose one or two children before they turn five. If you are lucky enough to work, you are probably a tenant farmer who must give your landowner 75 percent of your harvest. Or you may get occasional work as a day laborer at a large plantation growing bananas, sugar, or coffee for export. You reap few benefits from these crops; you'd prefer to grow food your children could eat.

[TURN BACK TO ADDRESS ENTIRE ROOM]

This is just a small slice of life as it plays out each day around the globe.

Now, we invite you to eat.

Those of you in the high-income group will be served a nutritious meal *[MAY MENTION MEAL]*. Those in the middle-income group may proceed to the buffet tables where rice and beans, *[IF THIS IS THE CASE]* are available. People in the low-income group seated on the floor, help yourselves to rice and water. *[YOU CAN ALSO SERVE RICE IN LARGE BOWLS PLACED ON THE FLOOR AND HAVE PEOPLE SERVE EACH OTHER]*. Bon appetit! *[PLAY MUSIC OR SLIDE SHOW DURING MEAL. AT THE END OF THE MEAL, TURN OFF AUDIO AND/OR VIDEO]*

Introduce Brett Boeckman after the meal and have him speak on his experiences in Sierra Leone, the poorest country in the world, and about extreme poverty and put a human face on it.

QUESTIONS TO ASK AT A HUNGER BANQUET

Older audiences:

- Would anyone like to share any of the thoughts they have on what has taken place here?
- Has anyone witnessed poverty in the US or in a visit to a poor country that they would like to share?

- Does anyone have any ideas on how the personal choices we as Americans make affect this unequal distribution?
- What might we all do to bring about a fairer distribution of resources?

If people are only focused on the dynamics of the banquet itself, remind participants that this is a simulation, not reality for most of us. Challenge the audience to discuss what this represents in the real world and ask what can be done to change things for the better.

CONCLUSION

There is still a lot of work to be done, yet there is also hope.

By attending this America Hunger Banquet, you have deepened your awareness of world hunger and poverty. The key now is how you put this awareness to use. Here are a few ways that you can get involved: