

USDA / USAID
INTERNATIONAL FOOD AID CONFERENCE

EMCEE NOTES

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16, 2008

Mike Hess

8:00 AM

My name is Mike Hess and I am the Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance in the U.S. Agency for International Development.

This morning, I have the honor of leading us in a memorial tribute to U.S. Congressman Tom Lantos.

(Pictures of Rep. Lantos will run during the memorial.)

In February, Representative Lantos died at the age of 80. He was known by many in this room and his work known by many more around the world.

The personal story of Tom Lantos as a Hungarian Holocaust survivor, the only Holocaust survivor to ever serve in the U.S. Congress, imbedded in him not just a

respect for human dignity but a strong will to fight for human rights.

In 1950, Tom Lantos immigrated to the United States after winning a college scholarship to study, earning a PhD in economics and becoming a professor.

Thirty year later, he would be elected to the House of Representatives, from California.

In 2007, Representative Lantos reached what he believed to be the pinnacle of his career. He became Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee.

During his career he did much to advance food security in some of the world's most vulnerable places. He was instrumental in the House of Representative's passage last year of the Food and Energy Security Act of 2007. This legislation was matched by a companion bill in the Senate, designed to re-authorize the PL 480 Title II international food aid program.

In urging his colleagues to pass the most recent authorization, Chairman Lantos said on the House floor "that this bill restores mandatory funding for the landmark McGovern-Dole program, which lives up to the accomplishments of the 2 great former Senators who created it. This program specifically targets the legions among the world's starving who are least able to help themselves: the children."

Chairman Lantos went on to say something that is close felt by us in this room who work and advocate for food security. He said that “The 850 million people around the world without sufficient food cling to a precarious existence: foraging for daily sustenance, unable to take care of their starving families, and locked into a perpetual cycle of poverty and hunger.

“The plight of the starving represents one of the most disturbing and dire societal shortfalls on this planet. And addressing worldwide hunger represents the most unambiguous American moral obligation that faces us today.”

Congressman Lantos’ leadership will be missed.