

Mary's Meals Statement on the International Day of Education

Learning for Lasting Peace

Bloomfield, N.J. – January 18, 2024 – Wednesday, January 24, is International Day of Education as designated by the United Nations General Assembly. This year's theme, Learning for Lasting Peace, celebrates the role of education for peace and sustainable development.

For 22 years, international school feeding organization Mary's Meals has worked alongside communities to provide daily meals in a place of education for children living in extreme poverty in areas where hunger often creates a barrier to learning. Reaching more than 2.4 million children with much-needed meals every school day, Mary's Meals mobilizes communities to run the school feeding program, with volunteer cooks preparing and serving the meals. The simple act of providing a meal for children where they learn promotes access to education while meeting children's immediate need for food and giving them energy to learn. Education is vital for breaking the cycle of poverty and creating a more equitable and peaceful world.

Mary's Meals currently works in 18 countries and, in hard-to-reach places, often collaborates with established local partners to deliver the program. Many of these partners have extensive experience in supporting communities through conflict and its aftermath. Most recently in Tigray, Ethiopia, and also South Sudan, Mary's Meals has seen firsthand the role school feeding and education is playing in transforming lives and fostering peace in the countries where the program operates.

The power of linking feeding and education is the backbone of Mary's Meals' work. It's been said that an empty stomach does not have ears to listen, and independently verified research has shown that children who receive Mary's Meals are happier, healthier and more able to participate in learning. Sadly, an estimated 67 million primary age children are still out of school and millions more are attending too hungry to learn.

As Mary's Meals founder and CEO Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow asks, "How can any part of the human family make progress if its children are without adequate food and access to at least a basic education?"

In a climate of escalating conflicts, achieving peace is critical and this has been prioritized as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that make up the 2030 SDG Agenda. Now, more than ever, achieving these goals is essential as they will create the foundations for building a more equitable, sustainable and peaceful world.

Mary's Meals recognizes this and works to achieve Zero Hunger (SDG 2) by boldly addressing child hunger with a low-cost and scalable model. The innovative school feeding program can also contribute to No Poverty (SDG 1), Quality Education (SDG 4), Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16), and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).