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Mary's Meals Declares "Right to Hope" at first Vatican Summit on Children's Rights

Global school feeding charity leader says hope is a child's right along with a daily meal and an education.

Bloomfield, N.J. – February 5, 2025 – On Monday, February 3, Mary's Meals Founder and CEO Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow told world leaders at the first World Leaders Summit on Children's Rights in Rome that it would cost just over \$3 billion dollars per year to serve a daily school meal to those children most in need in the world's lowest-income countries.

"There is no good reason why we cannot make – and keep – this promise to the world's poorest children ... "Hope should be another right for every child," he emphasized.

The summit drew global leaders, including Queen Rania of Jordan; Megawati Sukarnoputri, former President of Indonesia; Al Gore, former US Vice President; and Mario Draghi, Italian economist and EU advisor.

MacFarlane-Barrow opened his speech at the summit by sharing the origin story of Mary's Meals. "Twenty-four years ago, I had a conversation with a very hungry child. He was 14-years-old and, along with his five younger siblings, sat beside his mother Emma who was dying. He looked at me and said, 'I would like to have enough food to eat and to go to school one day.'"

That exchange took place in Malawi in 2002 and inspired the school feeding work of Mary's Meals, which became a global movement. Today, Mary's Meals provides school meals to more than 2.5 million children every school day in 16 of the world's poorest countries.

Following Monday's day-long debate and discussions, political leaders and representatives of countries and faiths from around the world signed a Concluding Declaration, stating that, among other things, the rights of children are still widely violated; indifference must not become the norm; nations must assume greater responsibility; a global commitment is needed; and peace starts with children and their protection. MacFarlane-Barrow asserted that children should also be afforded the 'Right to Hope.'

"I feel huge gratitude for the invitation to take part in this event and to Pope Francis and the organizers for including Mary's Meals. It's a privilege to represent the Mary's Meals family and to be the voice of the children we serve every school day. It was wonderful to have the opportunity to introduce the idea of the 'Right to Hope' alongside the other important rights of the child discussed," said MacFarlane-Barrow at the conclusion of the Vatican Summit. He added, "This summit has opened so many new doors for Mary's Meals; so many new people are expressing huge interest in our work. It's a very important step for Mary's Meals. It's been amazing to spend a couple of days in the company of so many incredible leaders and to spend time in this amazing city of Rome."

After listening to the Mary's Meals Founder, and the organization's contributions, Pope Francis announced that he will give continuity to this commitment and promote it. He will prepare an Apostolic Exhortation dedicated to children's rights.

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About Mary's Meals

Now in its 22nd year, Mary's Meals is a global movement that sets up school-feeding programs in some of the world's most vulnerable communities, where conflict, poverty and hunger often prevent children from gaining an education. Mary's Meals works with in-country volunteers and trusted partners to provide one daily nutritious meal in a place of learning to bring children into the classroom to receive an education. This simple solution to help end world hunger also enables children to lift themselves from the cycle of hunger and poverty.

Mary's Meals began by feeding 200 children in Malawi in 2002. Today, the organization feeds more than 2.4 million children every school day in more than 5,000 schools in the following countries: Benin, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, South Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Mary's Meals is part of the global School Meals Coalition, an emerging initiative of governments and partners to drive actions that can urgently reestablish, improve, and scale up food and education systems. For more information about Mary's Meals, visit marysmealsusa.org.

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