Of Hunger, Rainforests and Children

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"Few will have the greatness to bend history; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation." During the next seven minutes or so, I shall demonstrate how these words by Robert F. Kennedy are relevant to us in the 21st century.

Every day, some where on this globe called Earth, 24,000 people die of hunger or related causes. That is one person dying every 3.6 seconds. Three-fourths of the deaths are children under five. Although famine and wars cause about ten percent of hunger deaths, the majority are caused by chronic malnutrition. Families facing extreme poverty are simply unable to get enough food to eat.

One such family lives in Malawi, Africa. In Malawi, the recent cycle of floods and drought caused tremendous hardship and many people are suffering from famine. In one village, Bissigmund Wende surveys his storage bin. This is supposed to feed him and his nine children until next year. "I'm getting worried," he said. He distanced himself from family and continued quietly, "Unless I can find a way to get food, at least half of my children will die."

Every second, one hectare of rainforest disappears. That equals 86,000 hectares a day, and 31 million hectares a year. Put another way, every day, an area larger than New York City is stripped of rainforest, and in one year the equivalent of a country, the size of Poland is lost. If deforestation continues at current rates, scientists estimate nearly 80 to 90 percent of tropical rainforest ecosystems will be destroyed by the year 2020.

The importance of rainforests cannot be overstated. They occupy only a small percentage of the world's land surface, yet these remaining lush rainforests support over half of the world's wild plants and animals. The U.S. National Cancer Institute has identified 3000 plants that are ingredients of drugs, which combat cancer cells. 70% of these plants are found in the rainforest. Today, over one hundred pharmaceutical companies and several branches of the US government are engaged in plant research projects for possible drugs and cures against viruses, infections, cancer and even AIDS.

Every week 200,000 children die from preventable causes. Many millions more suffer from preventable disease, curable blindness, landmines and

other crippling accidents.

One day, Carlos Hernandez at the age of 13 would wake in the night because his right leg hurt so much. The pain being so unbearable, his mother rushed him to the government hospital in El Progreso, Honduras. The doctors provided pain medication, but couldn't pinpoint the cause of the pain. Carlos was sent home. When the pain worsened, Mrs. Hernandez turned to the nearby Children International clinic. There, finally Carlos was diagnosed with a rare bone infection. Minor surgery was suggested to control the infection, which meant returning to the government hospital. Mother and son waited in the overcrowded, understaffed hospital for eight days. When they were finally seen, the doctors recommended amputation in stead of the expensive medicine needed.

These are just a few of the many global problems that we face today. On the face of it, it would seem that there is little we can do. The problems in all their magnitude, seem too overwhelming for us as individuals to solve. However, there is something we can do; there is a place where even a little bit counts; there is a "place" called the Internet – and we can click.

The Hunger Site, at www.thehungersite.com, is the world's first online activism site. This site gives Internet users the daily opportunity to make a difference in the fight to end hunger. One click and a sponsor will pay to provide the hungry with a cup of staple food. In 2002, there were about 41 million clicks, which means that many cups of staple food were donated. The number of starving people helped depends on the number of people who visit The Hunger Site and click.

In the same way, let me ask you to click two more times. There are sites called TheRainforestSite.com and TheChildHealthSite.com which are sister sites of the Hunger Site. One click, and we have preserved 22.8 square feet of endangered rainforest. One click, and we have prevented life-threatening diseases and enable children to walk.

We as individuals can only do a little. However, the Internet can add up all of our little clicks and turns them into something far greater than their sum. Through the Hunger Site, the Rainforest Site and the Child Health Site, our clicks are transformed into food, rainforest and healthy children.

Charles Dickens, in his "A Christmas Carol" wrote, "I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year." With Christmas but a few weeks away, let us all remember that this is a time of charity, of sharing and of giving. Let us keep this throughout the year.

Is it too much to ask of you to click?