Guiding Principles
The twenty-first session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations announced its guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights. The Council stated that the foundational principles essential to an approach based on human rights must provide the foundation for the design and implementation of all public policies related to poverty reduction or affecting persons living in poverty.

It's important to note that these guiding principles may seem relevant only to developing countries or to a nation’s foreign policy - these guiding principles are relevant to all nations – developed nations and developing nations. These guiding principles provide each country with a standard as to how they treat the least wealthy within their respective countries; for example, does the U.S. federal budget provide for adequate food and nutrition for the millions within the U.S. that are in need of food? Does our nation’s budget provide a “circle of protection” at home and abroad?

The Council stated that human dignity is at the very foundation of human rights. It is inextricably linked to the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Respect for the inherent dignity of those living in poverty must inform all public policies. Government agencies and private individuals must respect the dignity of all, avoid stigmatization and prejudices, and recognize and support the efforts those living in poverty are making to improve their lives.

The Guiding Principles Include:
1. Dignity, universality, indivisibility, interrelatedness and interdependence of all rights.
2. Equal enjoyment of all human rights by persons living in extreme poverty.
4. Rights of the child.
5. Agency and autonomy of persons living in extreme poverty.
6. Participation and empowerment.
7. Transparency and access to information.
8. Accountability

Flowing from these guiding principles are specific rights of which the right to adequate food and nutrition are included.

Respect for the inherent dignity of those living in poverty must inform all public policy.

Adequate food is essential for health, survival, physical and intellectual development, and is a precondition for social integration, social cohesion and peaceful community life. Lack of food sovereignty compromises autonomy and dignity. Persons living in poverty often have limited access to adequate and affordable food, or the resources they need to produce or acquire such food. Even where adequate food is available, it often does not reach persons living in poverty because of cost, inadequate or discriminatory distribution, limited capacity of marginalized groups to access productive resources, lack of infrastructure or conflict.

The quality or nutritional value of the food that persons living in poverty are able to access is also a major concern. As a result of institutional
and interhousehold discrimination or cultural practices, women living in poverty are often denied equitable access to food, or their capacity to procure or produce food is undermined.

The Council recommends that countries:

a. Establish mapping systems to identify groups and households particularly vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity and the reasons for that vulnerability. Take corrective measures, to be implemented both immediately and progressively, to provide access to adequate food;

b. Adopt a national strategy to ensure food and nutrition security for all. Access to adequate food for persons living in poverty should be accorded priority and take into account the interdependence of access to productive and monetary resources and adequate nutrition;

c. Put in place adequate early-warning mechanisms to prevent or mitigate the effects of natural or human-caused disasters, including persons living in remote and/or marginalized areas, and take appropriate emergency preparedness measures;

d. Ensure adequate access to productive resources, including land, forests and fisheries, in order for persons to produce food for themselves and their families;

e. Implement effective land distribution and agrarian reform programs, especially in areas where land concentration threatens access to livelihoods for rural communities. Take preventive measures to avoid land and water grabbing;

f. Revise and repeal discriminatory laws and related administrative practices that impede the recognition of ownership or tenure rights of land and resources by groups or individuals, in particular women;

g. Adopt measures to eradicate any kind of discriminatory practices regarding food distribution within the household or community, especially with regard to gender, for example by channeling food production support through women;

h. Protect those who are unable to provide for themselves, by establishing and maintaining food safety nets linked to other complementary interventions that promote food security immediately and longer terms. Ensure that social assistance policies and programs take into account the true costs of a nutritious and culturally adequate diet;

i. Ensure effective distribution mechanisms that recognize market shortcomings to make adequate food physically and economically accessible, in a culturally acceptable way and without negatively affecting small farmers, indigenous peoples, forest dwellers, pastoralists or local subsistence fishing communities and women. This should include a review of overall systems for food pricing;

j. Ensure that all trade and investment policies, including those specific to food and agriculture, are conducive to fostering food and nutrition security for all, and take international collective action to address widespread food and nutrition insecurity and rising food prices. Strategies that support rural development based on human rights, promote sustainable food production and equitable distribution, and reduce volatility in commodity markets affecting food prices must be priority for countries at both the national and international levels.
Thanksgiving: How It Began

Most stories of Thanksgiving start with the harvest celebration of the Pilgrims and the Native Americans that took place in the autumn of 1621. Although they did have a 3-day feast in celebration of a good harvest, and the local natives did participate, this “first thanksgiving” was not a holiday, simply a gathering. There is little evidence that this feast led directly to our modern Thanksgiving Day holiday.

The Pilgrims who sailed to America aboard the Mayflower were originally members of the English Separatist Church. Earlier they fled England and sailed to Holland to escape religious persecution. There, they enjoyed more religious tolerance, but they eventually became disenchanted with the Dutch way of life, thinking it ungodly. Seeking a better life, the Separatists negotiated with a London stock company to finance a pilgrimage to America. Most of those making the trip aboard the Mayflower were non-Separatists, but were hired to protect the company’s interests. Only about 1/3 of the original colonists were Separatists.

The Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock on Dec. 11, 1620. Their first winter was devastating. At the beginning of the following fall, they had lost 46 of their original 102 members. The harvest of 1621 was a bountiful one. And the remaining colonists decided to celebrate with a feast, including 91 natives who had helped the Pilgrims survive their first year. It is believed that the Pilgrims would not have survived without the help of the natives. The feast was more of a traditional English harvest festival than a true “thanksgiving” observance. It lasted 3 days. Governor William Bradford sent “four men fowling” after wild ducks and geese. It is not certain that wild turkey was part of their feast. It is certain that they had venison. The term turkey was used by the Pilgrims to mean any sort of wild fowl.

It is highly unlikely that the first feast included pumpkin pie. The supply of flour had been long diminished, so there was no bread or pastries. They did eat boiled pumpkin, and a type of fried bread from their corn crop. There was no milk, cider, potatoes, or butter. There were no domestic cattle for dairy products, and the newly discovered potato was still considered by many Europeans to be poisonous. The feast included fish, berries, watercress, lobster, dried fruit, clams, venison and plums.

It wasn’t until June of 1676 that another Day of Thanksgiving was proclaimed. On June 20, 1676 the governing council of Charlestown, Massachusetts, held a meeting to determine how best to express thanks for their good fortune. By unanimous vote they instructed Edward Rawson to proclaim June 29 as a day of thanksgiving. It is notable that this thanksgiving celebration did not include Native Americans, as the celebration was meant partly to be in recognition of the colonists’ victory over the “heathen natives.” By then the settlers believed that the natives were a hindrance to their quest for more land, so the good will they shared at the first feast had long been lost.

A hundred years later, in Oct. of 1777 all 13 colonies joined in a thanksgiving celebration. It also commemorated the patriotic victory over the British at Saratoga. But it was a one-time affair.
George Washington proclaimed a National Day of Thanksgiving in 1789. There was discord among the colonies, many feeling the hardships of a few pilgrims did not warrant a national holiday. Later, President Thomas Jefferson opposed the idea of having a day of thanksgiving.

It was Sarah Josepha Hale, a magazine editor, whose efforts eventually led to what we recognize as Thanksgiving. Hale wrote many editorials in her Boston Ladies’ Magazine, and later, in Godey’s Lady’s Book. Finally, after a 40-year campaign of writing editorials and letters to governors and presidents, Hale’s obsession became a reality when in 1863 President Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as a national day of thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving was proclaimed by every president after Lincoln. The date was changed a couple of times. President Franklin Roosevelt set it at one week to the next-to-last Thursday in order to create a longer Christmas shopping season. Public uproar against this caused the president to move Thanksgiving back to its original date. And in 1941, Thanksgiving was finally sanctioned by Congress as a legal holiday, as the 4th Thursday in November.

Dear Lord, We thank you for the blessings of food, water, shelter, family and well-being. As we enjoy healthy food, we will think of those who struggle to feed their families every day.

You taught us to pray, “Give us today our daily bread” we make that prayer also for the millions who go hungry every day.

You fed the hungry. Inspire in us the commitment to follow your example, showing compassion in action and sharing what we have with those who have less.

You cared for all. Help us to remember your command to love one another. Help us to see you in each of our brothers and sisters—especially those who are in need.

You are the Bread of Life. Strengthen us as we work for justice. Help us to stand in solidarity with the poorest of the poor.

You came so that we could have life and have it to the full. Our prayer is that this might be true for all. We pray that communities and governments recognize our shared responsibility to be more just in sharing the world’s resources. Help us to care more deeply, live more simply and share more fully. Amen

ACTION: Let your member of Congress know that the Ryan Budget does not support the Guiding Principles of the Human Rights Council of the UN.