

**E**veryone on this earth has the same basic needs; it is only our circumstances that are different. As we gathered today, you were given your lot in this world that has been created. Look around, as you can see that equality and balance don't exist here.

It is important to notice that no one section of this room represents one country. Every country around the world has people who fall into the income groups represented today.

Now, I want to introduce the three segments of the world to you.

[Move near the high-income group]

**T**his group represents 15 percent of the world's population with a per capita income of \$8,900 or more. As a group, your income group is able to afford a nutritious daily diet. You have access to the best medical care. You were born destined to go to school; the only uncertainty is how many years will you study after high school.

As part of this income group your family has access to credit and money that most others do not. You and your family live in comfortable and secure housing. Your parents own at least one car, and probably have two televisions. When your family takes their annual two-week vacation, your parents don't worry about their jobs disappearing.

It's a good life because you and your family have access to everything you need and security to enjoy it.

[Move near the middle-income group]

**T**his group represents roughly 30 percent of the world's population. Your parents earn between \$725 and \$8,900 a year. The levels of access and security you and your family enjoy vary greatly. You are the folks who live on the edge. It would take losing only one harvest to drought, or a serious illness, to throw you and your family into poverty.

Your parents may work as day laborers, domestic help, or perhaps as migrant workers. You may go to school - for a few years anyway - especially if you are a boy. Your parents were born into this harsh life and hope that you will have an opportunity for a better one.

Your family probably owns no land and lives in overcrowded housing with shoddy plumbing. Your village or town offers electricity, but your family must ration their use. If only your

parents could get better skills training, they might have a chance at a higher-paying job. Maybe, if your family is lucky, your parents can find a way to join a community credit group to get access to a small loan.

So, like everyone stuck in the middle, your family feels squeezed, and they just hope that the bottom doesn't fall out from their world.

[Move near the low-income group]

**T**his group represents the majority of the world's population - roughly 55 percent. The average income is \$725 a year - about \$2 a day - although many of your family's earn much less. Most of you are from poor countries such as Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Haiti, or Cambodia.

Every day is a struggle for your family to meet their basic needs. Finding food, water, and shelter can consume your day. For many mothers, it would not be uncommon to walk five to 10 miles to find clean water; spend several more hours working in the fields and of course taking care of the children. School is a luxury few of you will ever experience. Most of you girls don't even bother to dream about school. Healthcare is out of the question, so for most families death is all too familiar, with families expecting to lose two to three of their children before they turn five.

Many of your family's are homeless or living in structures so flimsy that a hard rain or strong wind becomes life threatening. Many of you are frequently hungry. It is quite likely that your family doesn't get the minimum number of calories their hardworking life requires.

If your parents do work, they are probably tenant farmers or landless day workers. They reap few benefits from the crops they work on; they would prefer to grow food for you to eat themselves.

[To the entire group]

**N**o one can choose the circumstances into which they are born.

[Turn to the low-income group and ask any girl to stand.]

**Y**ou are Jant Omar. You live in Zaire, Africa. You live a hard life. As a girl at the age of 13, you were told you had to quit school to help your mother find clean water and food each day. You don't think this is fair, because your older brother still attends school, but your mother is sick and needs help with the daily chores to feed the family. You feel hopeless about your situation, and don't see a bright future ahead for

yourself.

[Turn to the low-income group and ask any boy to stand.]

**Y**ou are Jose Martin. Your dad was hurt today at his job picking coffee, which allowed him to provide the basics for your family in El Salvador. He does not have enough money to go and see a doctor and he is worried about where the money will come if he cannot work while recovering. You are also worried about what will happen to your family if your father cannot work.

[Turn to the low-income group and ask any girl to stand.]

**Y**ou are Anna Hernandez. You live down the street from Jose and your parents eke out a living selling fruit grown in their yard at a local market each day. Because Jose and many of your parents customers have been laid off from the nearby coffee plantation they are buying less from your parents, and they won't be able to afford enough corn for your family.

[Turn to the middle-income group and ask any boy to stand.]

**Y**ou are Sam Baker. You live in a big city in America with your mom who works at a clothing factory. You have all your basic needs met, but your mom never feels quite secure. She would like to buy your own car but can't seem to save enough money ever and the bank won't give her a loan.

[Turn to the middle-income group and ask any girl to stand.]

**Y**ou are Katrina Vaclavkova. You live in the Czech Republic. Your mother is a nurse and father is an accountant. You are able to buy clothes, music and other things that you want. Your family lives in a nice apartment. You attend a good school and all of your needs are met.

[Turn to the high-income group and ask any boy to stand.]

**Y**ou are Edward Simpson. You live in England with your family. Your parents both have very high-paying jobs and your and your 3 sisters are more than provided for. Your family lives in a big house, has three cars, and a housekeeper. You receive a weekly allowance from your parents.

[Address the entire class]

This is just a brief glimpse at how people live around the world. As we look into the different origins of poverty, I would like you to think about these characters that you have just been introduced to.

Adapted from Oxfam International - Hunger Banquet