

**UN Security Council Aria-Formula Meeting on Conflict and Hunger**  
**UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Michael Fakhri**  
**21 April 2022**

**OPENING BRIEF**

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to begin by thanking the Permanent Mission of Ireland for organizing today's meeting and for their long-standing commitment to addressing hunger and conflict.

As Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, I am an independent expert mandated by the Human Rights Council to report on and promote the right to food from a systemic perspective. I therefore have a unique and global overview on food systems. The General Assembly recently passed a resolution requesting that my next report be on the food crisis triggered by the pandemic and so I hope to see all of you again on that topic in October. My report to the Human Rights Council in February will directly address conflict and hunger.

Your excellencies – In the past 60 years, hunger and famine has not been caused by inadequate amounts of food. Hunger and famine, like conflicts, are always the result of political failures. Allow me to first explain how the current food crisis is caused by *international* failures. I will then provide two points in conclusion.

For over two years, people and civil society organizations around the world have been raising the alarm about the food crisis. For over two years, I amongst others, have been calling for an international coordinated response to the food crisis. And yet Member States have refused to mobilize the Rome-based agencies and other UN organizations to respond to the food crisis in a coordinated way. I'll give you two examples of missed opportunities:

- One of the most important food organizations is the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in Rome. After the 2007 food crisis, Member States transformed and empowered the CFS. Today the CFS is *the* inclusive, multilateral platform dedicated to facilitating global policy coherence.

In fact, in 2015, the CFS negotiated a Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises. I found this Framework helpful when preparing my remarks today.<sup>1</sup>

Some Member States and civil society organizations tried to get the CFS to pass a resolution last October in order for it to be the place to enable global policy coordination around the food crisis. And yet some powerful countries – some members of the P5 –

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/423451/>. See also <https://www.csm4cfs.org/14260/>

actively blocked that initiative. This undermined the world's ability to respond to the food crisis.

- The second example is also from this past year. With the Food Systems Summit, we saw a global commitment to help every single country transform their food system to eliminate hunger, famine, and malnutrition--- but also to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss. And yet, the pandemic and the food crisis were not addressed by the Summit.

I want to stress that how we tackle this food crisis, how you address hunger and conflict, will not just be a response to extraordinary circumstances. How you tackle the food crisis will be how you in effect transform the world's food systems for decades to come.

You have all been well briefed today as to the specifics of how bad the situation is today. The question I am asking myself is the following: Why is it only after the Russian invasion of Ukraine has there been this degree of political focus on the food crisis? The fact that, only now is there some semblance of a global response to the food crisis reveals what is at stake. This is the moment in which international institutions' legitimacy and national governments' ability to maintain security is threatened.

I am here before you today because we have all failed. Every UN agency, every regional body, every government has failed. Governments and international institutions have failed to listen to the most vulnerable communities and respond to their demands. Governments and international institutions have failed to cooperate and coordinate. This is why we are facing the threat of more famine and more armed conflict.

This leads me more directly to our discussion today. Resolution 2417 is a very powerful tool. It is powerful because it recognizes that hunger is a cause and effect of armed conflict. It is powerful because it warns against using food as a weapon. And it is powerful because it appreciates the unique relationship between hunger and armed conflict, while also recognizing the complexity of hunger in holistic and systemic terms.

So, with all this in mind, let me conclude with two points. My first point is to the Security Council. My final point is to Member States more broadly.

### **To the Security Council –**

I think one of the most important aspects of Resolution 2417 is its reporting requirement. Here, I am drawing from the work of the organization named Global Rights Compliance.

I think reporting is a key factor to enable everyone to mobilize to *prevent* hunger and famine if a conflict were to arise or alternatively to *prevent* armed conflict in the first place. However, as you know, gathering information in places on the verge of conflict or in the midst of conflict is logistically difficult and politically sensitive. There has been a clear call to establish a designated focal point or Special Envoy around Resolution 2417. This is worth discussing.

While the Security Council's powers are limited to peace and security, the reports they receive must understand food in systemic terms so they can decide what to do. If you create a focal point or Special Envoy – or whatever advancements you make in the reporting – the scope should reflect Resolution 2417's holistic commitment to addressing root causes and the recognition that armed conflict directly and indirectly destabilizes food systems. Even if you think the Security Council should have a limited scope, you must understand food in systemic terms before you can decide how to act. The purpose could be to provide reports that can help all the relevant actors, and not just the Security Council. The ultimate goal of a humanitarian response should not just be relief, but also long-term recovery and peace based on justice.

### **Now to Member States –**

Food cuts across every aspect of life. With the newest shock to our food systems, almost every international organization is now on high alert. A major barrier against a comprehensive response to rising rates of hunger and conflict is that different international organizations have limited mandates. I commend the Secretary General for recently establishing a Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance.

What is missing is political will for a coordinated response to the crisis. And I think that is what all of you as Member States can provide. Whether it's through the ECOSOC, the General Assembly, or Committee on World Food Security, the world needs a clear, political statement that both reaffirms governments' commitment to the right to food and provides an institutional map that activates, guides, and coordinates all international institutions around the right to food.

### **FINAL REMARKS AT THE END OF THE MEETING**

I want to first thank the Chair for her incredible feat of facilitating a complex conversation today. What I will do is briefly reflect upon what I heard today.

There was resounding consensus around the premise of Security Council Resolution 2417 (2018). If I am not mistaken, all but one country today (India) emphasized the fact that hunger is both the cause and effect of conflict. There was also consensus that the world is in the midst of a profound global food crisis.

I want to end with how a food systems analysis would clarify some of the points made today. Not surprisingly, there was a divide over the cause of the world food crisis. Western countries focused on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and some suggested that it was the principal cause of the global food crisis. There is no doubt in my mind that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is wrong, and that Russia is responsible for the death and displacement of millions of civilians. Russia should end the war immediately and unconditionally. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is one of the most recent global shocks to food systems, but it is not the cause. Rates of hunger and the risk of famine was on the rise before the pandemic and made even worse during the pandemic. Some delegates went so far to say (or imply) that an attack against Ukraine is an attack against the global food system. I would strongly advise against this line of thinking for two reasons. First, it suggests that if a country is not a principal exporter of a major food stuff, then the Security Council would consider it less of a priority to intervene and end an invasion or occupation. Second, if we have

learned anything from the pandemic it is that all food systems are inherently interconnected; an invasion or occupation of any place is an attack on the global food system.

The Russian Federation and its allies focused on how unilateral coercive measures generate hunger and famine and disrupt food systems around the world. This statement is also true. In fact, some of the same countries chastising Russia are countries implicated in the blockade against Yemen that has led to famine and the starvation of tens of thousands of children since 2015. Today, over 2 million children in Yemen are suffering from acute malnutrition.

So, even though both sides disagree geopolitically, their statements regarding hunger and conflict have been true. But neither side goes far enough in their food systems analysis. It is true that the Russian invasion against Ukraine disrupted global markets, and that prices are skyrocketing. But that also tells us that markets are part of the problem. Markets are amplifying shocks and not absorbing them. I can give you two things to focus on to better understand why markets are causing more harm. First, the WTO has been at a standstill over agriculture negotiations and food security for over 25 years. The international trade rules in agriculture are outdated. The fact that a significant number of countries and the WFP relied on just 1 or 2 countries for a major food stuff like wheat tells us that the trade system does not work the way it should. Second, food prices are soaring not because of a problem with supply and demand as such; it is because of price speculation in commodity futures markets. Global prices have been drastically fluctuating for the past two years partly because commodity markets in the US were deregulated in 2000 (through the Commodity Futures Modernization Act).

The other issue some delegates raised is the disruption of the supply of fertilizer caused by the war in Ukraine. I agree that in the immediate term, countries and suppliers should do what they can to ensure that farmers get access to fertilizer. But the reliance of chemical fertilizers is the ultimate problem. Chemical fertilizer may sometimes boost production in the short term, but it will deplete the soil and harm the environment in effect violating people's rights to life, food, and a healthy environment. There are a host of techniques that allow farmers to grow enough food without depending on chemical inputs, much less imported chemical inputs.

In sum, a large number of delegates noted how hunger and conflict is a concern in a number of places around the world and recognize the global nature of the problem. I remain available to assist Member States as they continue to tackle today's global challenges.