**Response to Questionnaire on Food Systems**

Habitat International Coalition (HIC) – Housing and Land Rights Network

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

**Most salient challenges facing the food systems:**

i. *Protracted armed conflicts and occupations* are prevalent in the MENA region. Food system breakdown is common in these contexts, as fragile and unsustainable livelihoods lead to dependence on food and agricultural assistance, which often comes with a lack of choice and agency around food. This breakdown both leads to, and is exacerbated by fragile or unsustainable livelihoods, and often disrupts local production. Food deprivation, most recently seen in the form of military sieges in Yemen, Syria, and Gaza, as well as settler violence across the rural West Bank of occupied Palestine, is also increasingly used as a weapon. Even where famine conditions do not exist, people often are deprived of access to, and use of land, water and other natural resources, either due to the destruction of, or appropriation of by aggressors.

ii. *Lack of support for small-scale food producers* extends from states through to international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, which focus on concepts such as resource efficiency and monetary value of export crops without appropriately considering how this imbalanced focus impacts the broader food systems of this region. HIC’s Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) has undertaken analyses[[1]](#endnote-1) of two recent iterations of FAO policy advice in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region that show no will to challenge or mitigate the phenomenon of “rural transformation” (i.e., a move away from traditional farming), an absence of agroecology as a model for sustainable food systems, lack of human rights framing, insufficient consultation with small-scale producers and civil society, and failure to address structural causes impoverishing small-scale farmers.

iii. Related to both points above, *natural resource scarcity* (particularly water) in this region is often presented as a rationale for continuing high dependency on food imports, and efficiency-based models that do not necessarily support local and regional food systems or small-scale food producers. Scarcity, however, is only part of the story. In the West Bank, for example, water is not scarce – Ramallah receives more rainfall than London[[2]](#endnote-2) – it is diverted by the Israeli government and apartheid-chartered parastatal institutions (e.g., Mekorot)[[3]](#endnote-3) away from Palestinians before they can capture and use it. Similarly, in Western Sahara, the Moroccan agricultural industry exploits groundwater belonging to the indigenous Sahrawi people.[[4]](#endnote-4)

**Consideration of those challenges in deliberations of the UN Food Systems Summit:**

We are pleased to see some specific focus on armed conflict in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus Action Area 1.1 of Action Track 5 of the Summit. However, the language of the most recent “Wave 2” synthesis report[[5]](#endnote-5) is very much the standard development and humanitarian industry approaches we have already seen elsewhere. Given the clear need for systemic change in how food systems are approached in contexts of conflict, this appears to be a missed opportunity to reimagine a less top-down and more comprehensive human rights-based approach to food system support and armed conflict, both preventive and remedial applications. Language does not suggest that impacted communities would have more than a token role in participating in externally driven interventions outside of their control.

Although we note improvements in the definition of resilience used here, to include the ability to resist without compromising human rights[[6]](#endnote-6), this continued push toward resilience-framing puts the onus largely on impacted communities rather than on those actors who are contributing to or benefitting from armed conflicts (directly or indirectly) or who are contributing to unjust and unsustainable food systems.

Lastly, rights, knowledge and contributions of small-scale food producers appear to be side-lined in favour of “solutions” proposed by agribusiness, especially transnational corporations, and IFIs.

**HIC Participation in the Food Systems Summit:**

HIC has decided to boycott participation in the Summit, aligning ourselves with hundreds of other civil society groups in the CSM that are deeply concerned over corporate capture of this process, lack of independent self-organizing mechanism for civil society participation, circumvention of the existing competent policy mechanism (CFS), and lack of human rights framing in the development of the Summit (though we appreciate that human rights have, at a more recent stage, been somewhat acknowledged).

**Expectations from the Summit’s outcomes following its conclusion and how those might contribute to the full realization of the right to food for all:**

Given the late inclusion of human rights framing and the clear prioritization of large-scale agribusiness over civil society and small-scale food producer priorities, and lack of meaningful participation and partnership with civil society in the development of the Summit, we are skeptical that full realization of the human right to food was ever a consideration, let alone goal of the Summit, and doubtful that the Summit will contribute, intentionally or unintentionally, to that objective.

**Implementation of the Summit’s outcomes and our role in that implementation, including which international and regional frameworks or forums could serve as a useful platform:**

Several policy outcomes already have been negotiated and endorsed by member states within the CFS that were also endorsed by civil society (through the CSM) and private sector (through the PSM), but have not been adequately implemented. The ongoing CFS policy monitoring process is revealing this shortcoming.[[7]](#endnote-7) It is, therefore, difficult to comprehend why focus should turn to implementing the ambiguous outcomes of a less-inclusive, less-transparent, and clearly biased (toward corporate food regimes) Food Systems Summit. Based on these concerns, it remains unclear if the Summit’s outcomes would have policy relevance and/or should be implemented at all. Considering also the UN’s double promise that all three peace, development and human rights pillars of the Charter would guide policy[[8]](#endnote-8) and to pool all assets across the Development System,[[9]](#endnote-9) CFS would have been the more appropriate forum in which to hold this Summit, even if actors would be expanded to include those who have not until now participated in CFS.

If Summit outcomes are deemed acceptable by small-scale food producers, people living in rural areas, vulnerable populations such as people living through war and under occupation, consumers, and other most impacted within food systems, it would be important that UN agencies, including the RBAs, but also other relevant UN agencies such as UNEP and UNDP, take a leading role in implementation. However, it should be stressed that the added value that UN agencies bring to implementation is their UN Charter- and human rights-based approaches, which are not always evident in the work of these agencies (as noted in the example of FAO policy guidance, cited above).

**Endnotes:**

1. HIC-HLRN, “Evaluating FAO Policy Advice,” *Land Times*, Issue 19 (April 2020), <http://landtimes.landpedia.org/newsdes.php?id=p2ls&catid=ow==&edition=pGg=> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Visualizing Palestine, “West Bank Water,” 2013, <https://visualizingpalestine.org/visuals/west-bank-water>. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *See* Al Haq, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, HIC-HLRN and Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, “Joint Urgent Appeal to the United Nations Special Procedures on the escalating water and sanitation crisis in the Gaza Strip, occupied Palestinian territory,” <http://www.hlrn.org/img/documents/Urgent%20action_water%20crisis_Gaza,%20Palestine_9Nov2020.pdf>. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Western Sahara Resource Watch, 21 July 2020. Farming in the occupied desert. <https://wsrw.org/en/news/agriculture>. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. UN Food Systems Summit, “AT5 Synthesis of game-changing propositions (waves 1 and 2),” 20 May 2021 pp. 7, 16–17, <https://foodsystems.community/?attachment=3485&document_type=document&download_document_file=1&document_file=361>. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. *Ibid*, p. 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. *CSM Report on Monitoring the use and application of the FFA* (Rome: Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism for relations with the UN Committee on World Food Security, February 2021, <http://www.csm4cfs.org/14260/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. “Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: ensuring a better future for all,” Report of the Secretary-General, [A](https://undocs.org/A/72/124)[/72/124–E](https://undocs.org/A/72/124)/2018/3, 11 July 2017, paras. 2 and 14, <https://undocs.org/A/72/124>; Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises, CFS 2015/42/4, 13 October 2015, paras. 15–16, <http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/Docs1415/FFA/CFS_FFA_Final_Draft_Ver2_EN.pdf>. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. A/72/124–E/2018/3, *op. cit.,* paras. 32, 53 and 79. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)