5 April 2024

H.E. Ambassador Nosipho Nausca-Jean Jezile
Chair of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

Subject: Urgent Call for Action to Address the Genocide and Starvation in Gaza

Dear Ambassador Nosipho Nausca-Jean Jezile

We, organizations participating in the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism’s (CSIPM) Equity and Global Food Governance working groups, and the CSIPM Advisory Group, are writing to you with a grave concern that requires immediate and decisive action by the international community, including by members of the UN Committee on World Food Security. In this sense, we kindly request you, Chairperson, to circulate this letter to CFS members and participants for their consideration.

We thank you for your 22 March statement, calling for a humanitarian ceasefire and unrestricted humanitarian access to address the immediate needs of the civilian population in Gaza, while stressing the need to refrain from using food and water as weapons of war. We appreciate the fact that you have highlighted the CFS workstream on “Collaborative governance for coordinated policy responses” as a means to facilitate collaborative policy responses towards the realization of the Right to Food. We hope that you can continue to refer to the Report of CFS 51 (point III. 11) in your outreach activities related to this matter, while also noting the need to apply the CFS-FFA in the Gaza strip and in all situations of conflict and protracted crisis.

The genocide in Gaza has reached a critical point, according to the IPC: “the entire population in the Gaza Strip (2.23 million) is facing high levels of acute food insecurity. Between mid-March and mid-July, in the most likely scenario and under the assumption of an escalation of the conflict including a ground offensive in Rafah, half of the population of the Gaza Strip (1.11 million people) is expected to face catastrophic conditions (IPC Phase 5), the most severe level in the IPC Acute Food Insecurity scale, and at a never-before seen scale since the creation of the IPC. UN experts, including the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, have repeatedly condemned Israel’s campaign of starvation and destruction of local food systems in the besieged Palestinian enclave, while reiterating that “Israel is not respecting its international legal obligations, is not complying with the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice, and is committing atrocity crimes”.

In addition, the suspension of funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) by 16 major donors—including the US, Italy, UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and Japan—following unsubstantiated allegations against 12 of its 13,000 employees, threatens to sever the principal lifeline for Gazans and especially affect women and children. The collective financial loss is $363.3 million, or 42.7 percent, of the budgeted income for the agency in 2024. This action not only impacts those in Gaza but also affects approximately 3 million Palestinian refugees across the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. It is a stark reminder of the collective punishment being inflicted upon the Palestinian people.
The Israeli occupation’s violence against the Palestinian people in Gaza has escalated to a level that goes beyond violations of human rights and crime against humanity. Several UN Special Rapporteurs – including the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Michael Fakhri – and other experts on genocide, have categorized Israel’s actions as a genocide. The International Court of Justice has also acknowledged the plausibility of such acts amounting to genocide, and recognized that the deprivation of the access to humanitarian aid and reproductive care are key components of this plausible crime. In light of these developments, the violence and civilian harm have only intensified, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

In addition to actively blocking and denying access to food and manufacturing a famine, the Israeli occupation’s genocidal war has bombed food aid workers and has massacred people seeking life saving aid. Immediate humanitarian access and relief are the primary concern, and these are being blocked.

However, we stress that humanitarian interventions alone will not suffice. Food systems in Gaza are being intentionally destroyed. The CSIPM organizations on the territory have reported how the long-standing occupation and war are devastating Gaza’s agricultural lands, production inputs, fishing fleet, and all aspects of the food systems, leading to a humanitarian catastrophe of unprecedented scale since World War II. The use of illegal white phosphorus by Israeli forces has both massacred Gaza’s people and contaminated its environment, and its pumping of sea water into the ground will further destabilize the ecosystem. This destruction has created conditions for long-lasting violations of fundamental human rights, including the right to food, the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and the rights of future generations. Israel is deliberately starving Palestinians by undermining Palestinian people’s food sovereignty. The use of starvation and the deliberate destruction of the food systems as a weapon of war against civilians is a dire violation of human rights and international law. Palestinians in Gaza constitute 80% of people facing famine or catastrophic hunger globally, and the international community cannot remain silent. This ongoing crisis is the culmination of not only the past six months of Israeli genocidal war on Gaza, but 76 years of Israeli settler colonialism of Palestine.

Therefore, considering the FAO Constitution’s commitment to ensuring a world free from hunger, the mandate of the CFS as the foremost inclusive intergovernmental platform to achieve global food security based on the right to food, and the strong concern expressed in the report of CFS 51 (Point III. 11) regarding the impact of conflict on food security, nutrition, and agriculture in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip, we call upon members and participants of the Committee on World Food Security to immediately request a CFS Bureau decision to convene an extraordinary session as foreseen in the rules of procedure “XXIII 7 Rule XXXIII 7” to:

- discuss the ongoing genocide and actions that must be taken by the member states to respect, protect and fulfill the right to food, especially the unhindered access to humanitarian relief

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1 “The Committee stressed the need to refrain from using food and water as weapons of war in conflict areas, expressed the need for reliable, sustained, sufficient and unhindered access of essential goods and services to civilians throughout the Gaza Strip, and in other conflict areas, including but not limited to water, food, medical supplies, and energy, and stressed the role of FAO, IFAD and WFP, in coordination and collaboration with other United Nations agencies, international financial institutions and relevant bodies, to assess and address, within their respective mandates, the impact of the conflict on food security, nutrition, and agriculture in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip.”
recognize that the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the long-lasting occupation of Palestine represent violations of the right to food and impedes food sovereignty for the Palestinian People
- call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in addition to unconditional access to humanitarian relief
- facilitate dialogue among the member states to ensure consistent and adequate funding of the UNRWA so that access to essential goods, including food, water, fuel, and medicine, is urgently made possible especially in the North where no food convoys are currently allowed
- support the adoption of a ‘common but differentiated responsibilities approach’ for future efforts to rebuild Gaza's food system and infrastructure, so as to ensure accountability and consolidation of a long-term food and nutrition security while working towards food sovereignty.

We also urge the CFS Bureau and Advisory Group, as well as related CFS OEWGs, to:

- In the short-term:
  - Leverage the Collaborative Governance and Coordinated Policy Response Workstream to address the issue of conflict-related hunger hot spots, including the famine in Gaza, especially given its aim to prioritize voices of most affected countries and constituencies, to open the platform for issues that could be too controversial for policy convergence processes and to address structural issues that require policy coordination. The first bi-annual meeting in May is an initial opportunity to do so.
  - Propose that the ongoing starvation of the Palestinian people in Gaza and the other human-made starvation crises around the world be a topic within relevant CFS workstreams, for instance the workstream on Reducing Inequalities, to ensure it receives focused attention and discussion among member states and participants.
  - Give visibility to food crises, particularly in Gaza, in CFS internal and external communication.
  - Privilege the voices of the most affected communities and actors in discussing the drivers and root causes of such crises.

- In the medium and long term:
  - Commission an HLPE report or briefing note on the impact of the plausible Israeli genocide on food security and the right to food in Palestine and across the region, providing an evidence-based analysis to inform CFS discussions and policy recommendations, particularly taking into account the Framework for Action for Food Insecurity in Protracted Crises (FFA) and understanding how these recommendations can address the complexities of food security in conflict situations, specifically in Gaza.
  - Expedite the progress on the use and implementation of the CFS-FFA and enhance its uptake before the forthcoming 10-year anniversary, including through the development of the CFS Action Plan on “Increasing Awareness, Ownership, Use and Usefulness of CFS Policy Outcomes”. This is crucial as it directly tackles the root causes of food insecurity amidst conflicts and occupation and as it represents the first global consensus on mitigating food insecurity during protracted crises, based on humanitarian, development and human rights principles.
o Include monitoring of the violations of the right to food in Gaza and other conflict-related hunger hot spots in the Global Thematic Events on the 20th anniversary of the RtFG at CFS 52 and the Global Thematic Event on Conflicts and Food Security at CFS 53 while also addressing reparations of right to food violations.

The rights to food, water, sanitation, health and life, among others, are being violated, and it is the collective responsibility of the international community and every Member State to uphold these rights, especially in times of crisis. We request the Committee on World Food Security – which was reformed to become more effective in facilitating coordination and convergence in times of crisis – to lead by example and take decisive steps to condemn the weaponsation of food, starvation and suffering in Gaza and all of historic Palestine.

**Israel is creating a -one kilometer wide- buffer zone** along the Gaza strip, confiscating fertile land and systematically destroying the ability of Palestinians to feed themselves. The repercussions of this **war crime** go beyond humanitarian distress, it undermines Gaza’s/Gazaouis resilience for the future to come.

The people of Gaza cannot wait, concrete action and sanctions must be taken immediately to save lives, restore dignity, and ensure that the right to food and their right to self determination, central to the UN Charter, are respected. What is at stake here is not only the basic needs, livelihoods and dignity of 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza, it is the very credibility of the multilateral system and its ability to uphold the human principles and values around which nations committed to post World War II in the spirit of “Never again”.

Thank you for your attention to our urgent request. We look forward to your response and are eager to discuss how we can support your efforts.

As underscored by Michael Fakhri and other independent human rights experts within the UN system, allowing occupation, starvation and genocide without any repercussions, will only encourage more impunity. This concerns us all.

Sincerely,

CSIPM Advisory Group and the CSIPM Working Groups on Equity and on Global Food Governance