

***Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food
Michael Fakhri***

“Report from UNGA and HRC”

CFS51 Monday, 23 October 2023

My name is Michael Fakhri and I am the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

This means that I am independent expert who acts as the eyes, ears, and good conscience for the UN system on all matters regarding hunger, malnutrition and famine from a human rights perspective.

It is my job to talk to and learn from everyone.

I talk with governments, social movements, activists, businesses, journalists, researchers, students, and international civil servants.

I am an active member of the CFS Advisory Board and my work connects UN activities between Rome, New York, and Geneva.

Six months ago I presented my report to the Human Rights Council on violence and conflict in food systems. The main cause of hunger, malnutrition, and famine are armed conflicts and violence that arise from our food systems. My main policy advice to the Human Rights Council was that the CFS the Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises is the best framework to use because it is

grounded in international human rights law and addresses the root cause of protracted crises.

We are going to see more conflict in our food systems. Also, while at the General Assembly last week, I along with several other UN Human Rights experts raised the alarm and warned that food was being used a weapon to starve civilians in Gaza. We warned that there is a risk of genocide by Israel against the Palestinian people, unless the international community ensures a ceasefire and flow of humanitarian relief.

The other thing about the General Assembly that they asked me to provide them a report on how to recover from the pandemic and transform food systems so that they are more resilient to climate change and increase biodiversity.

Just last week, I delivered that report and engaged in an interactive dialogue with the General Assembly.

My report is the culmination of three years bearing witness to the pandemic and food crisis.

In that report to the General Assembly, I outline what can be right now.

And what can be done into the future.

In other words, based on consulting governments, food producers, and communities in cities and rural areas all over the world, I have learned from everyone and provided a detailed plan on how to recover from the food crisis and transform food systems.

This is what the right to food is about. The right to food and human rights more broadly allows us to identify shared values and enhances people's dignity.

- It provides a common framework that enables international cooperation and cohesion.

What I told the General Assembly is that if they pass a strong right to food resolution this year, if they recognize that the right to food is the key way to transform national food systems and deal with the food crisis, that the CFS is ready to put that political energy into action.

The reason I felt confident to say that to the General Assembly last Friday was because I have been so impressed by the progress made at the CFS.

The right to food is in the vision statement of the CFS.

And most importantly, the right to food is a central feature of the draft MYPOW – and this was one of the least controversial aspects of drafting the MYPOW.

Over the last two years, I have seen more and more countries take up the right to food in their national and international policies.

Moreover, since 2009 the CFS has produced a series of negotiated principles, frameworks and guidelines that has given the world everything it needs to deal with the multiple crises at hand.

- It is time for the CFS to use its own tools and reinvigorate its mandate to coordinate at the global level as well as support and advise countries and regions.

We are in the midst of the food crisis that is getting worse every day, and climate change is the existential fight of our generation.

Now is the time to use whatever tools we have at hand and work together in a multilateral forum that prioritizes human rights.

To recover from the current food crisis, and with an eye to the future, States face three issues. They must:

- (1) Respond to the food crisis with national plans;
- (2) Develop an international coordinated response to the food crisis; and
- (3) Transform their food systems to make them more resilient to climate change and prevent biodiversity loss.

States must address all three issues as interdependent. If you do not cooperate and develop an international coordinated response, your national plans to recover from the food crisis will fail.

At the same time, how you respond to the multiple crises at hand will significantly affect the nature of your food systems for decades to come.

To understand the food crisis, we must appreciate that food systems are part of a global economy built upon relationships of dependency and extractivism.

To move past the food crisis, we must support and deepen relationships based on care and reciprocity. We must build our economies around these relationships of care and reciprocity.

During the pandemic, when people were struggling and hunger was on the rise, people took care of each other in profound ways.

By taking care of their family, friends and neighbours, people ensured that someone was strong enough to take care of them in their own time of need.

Relationships of reciprocity were key to ensuring that people were resilient during the pandemic.

What further complicates matters is that problems in our food system are long-standing, structural problems.

In very general terms, the rate of hunger and malnutrition has been on the rise since 2015. The pandemic made existing problems worse. No country, rich or poor, has escaped the food crisis.

For at least the past 60 years, we have always had more food available than we need on a global basis.

Hunger and famine are always the result of political failures. So hunger is inherently a political problem, a question of power and institutions, and not a production problem.

You know the right to food is not just in the vision statement of the CFS. It is the constitution of the FAO. One of the FAO's purposes is to "ensuring humanity's freedom from hunger"

- not "zero hunger"... hunger isn't just something you measure. But freedom from hunger, which is what the right to food is about.

Freedom from hunger means we should be working towards freedom from oppression, exploitation, and occupation.

By fulfilling the right to food, you are creating the conditions for peace.