



“What can we do?”:

Global and local actions to implement UN Security Council Resolution 2417

Introduction

In 2023, 282 million people worldwide faced acute food insecurity¹ - nearly triple the figure recorded in 2016². Year after year, conflict continues to be the primary driver of hunger and malnutrition, including for 135 million people in over 20 countries and territories in 2023. Civilians bear the brunt of these conflicts, as livelihoods collapse, food production halts, communities are displaced and access to markets and health services becomes limited.

These figures are unacceptable and avoidable, and they call for extensive and concerted intervention. The human right to adequate food was initially inscribed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights³, and is recognised in several instruments under international law. Alarming, however, hunger is often deliberately used as a weapon of warfare. Actions aimed at harming civilians are preventable, and they contravene provisions of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) that protect civilians in conflict. Whether driven by deliberate intent or not, the devastating impact of conflict on civilian's access to food must be addressed.

In 2018 the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2417 (UNSCR 2417)⁴, which recognises the link between conflict and hunger and condemns the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access to civilian populations. This ground-breaking resolution identifies conflict-induced hunger as a matter of international peace and security and demands compliance with IHL. Yet its adoption has not significantly influenced the conduct of hostilities.

Concerted global action remains insufficient, fostering a sense of impunity for parties to conflict. Moreover, high-level engagement must shift to a longer-term approach, integrate development programming, and focus on peace-building, good governance and democracy in post-conflict environments to avoid the danger of relapse into conflict.

As hunger and humanitarian conditions worsen in places like Gaza and Sudan, this toolkit provides a brief overview of how conflict and violence can impact food and nutrition insecurity⁵, and outlines practical actions that key actors – from governments to multilateral institutions and parliamentarians – can take to help reverse the devastating rise of conflict-driven hunger and malnutrition.

How do conflict and violence affect food insecurity?

Conflict affects food and nutrition security in numerous ways, with immediate and long-term impacts on food accessibility, production and distribution. In most cases, civilians bear the brunt of these effects. Situations of armed conflict are regulated by IHL, which imposes rules on parties to a conflict to limit the impact of war on civilians and civilian infrastructure. It regulates how people affected by conflict, especially civilians, should be treated and protected in international and non-international conflicts, including in contexts of occupation.

Several rules of IHL safeguard civilians' access to food, water and medicine. They prohibit parties to a conflict from using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare⁶, restricting access to humanitarian relief⁷, attacking or restricting humanitarian personnel delivering aid⁸, or destroying⁹, damaging, removing or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population¹⁰. By disregarding these norms, parties to a conflict can contribute to long and short-term hunger for the civilian population.

Some of the ways in which conflict fuels food and nutrition insecurity include:

Disruption of food systems

- *Loss of agricultural production.* Violence and insecurity may force farmers to abandon their fields or prevent them from planting and harvesting crops. This diminishes local food supplies and devastates the livelihoods of those who rely on agriculture
- *The destruction of crops and killing of livestock.* This inherently undermines the ability of farmers and communities to make a living and produce for their own consumption
- *The destruction and damage to infrastructure critical to food production.* This includes irrigation systems, drinking water infrastructure and food storage facilities, and further cripples the production and preservation of food. This leads to immediate shortages and long-term declines in agricultural productivity
- *Severe disruption to supply chains.* Transportation routes, critical for moving food from farms to markets, become impassable due to insecurity and damaged infrastructure. Markets can be destroyed or become inaccessible, breaking down the distribution networks that communities rely on.

Impediments to humanitarian access

- *Humanitarian aid often cannot reach those most in need.* Conflict zones are frequently too dangerous and inaccessible for aid organisations to effectively deliver food and medical assistance for acute malnutrition
- *Aid workers and convoys are deliberately targeted.* Deconfliction mechanisms, intended to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, may fail
- *Bureaucratic obstacles in delivering aid.* Authorities or armed forces controlling a territory may demand excessive documentation or deliberately impose entry restrictions on items essential to the survival and dignity of affected populations. For international staff, lengthy visa processes can be used to hinder a humanitarian response.

Loss of livelihoods

- *Displacement of populations.* Civilians are uprooted, often fleeing to seek safety in areas that lack sufficient resources to support them. Displaced populations strain the limited resources of host communities, exacerbating food insecurity
- *Economic instability.* This is an inevitable consequence of conflict and frequently leads to job loss, depriving people of the income needed to buy food. Inflation, a common consequence of prolonged violence, drives food prices to soar, pushing even basic sustenance out of reach for many
- *Scarcity of production and supply chain disruptions in conflict-affected areas increase food prices,* deepening poverty and hunger amongst the most vulnerable populations. The war in Ukraine, for example, has demonstrated how food speculation and global interdependencies can harm regional supply chains, with severe human costs.



Agricultural infrastructure in Gaza

In October 2024, the IPC analysis classified the entire territory of Gaza as facing Emergency levels of food insecurity (IPC 4), and indicated a substantial risk of famine throughout the Gaza Strip until at least April 2025. Children are dying of malnutrition. Beyond the immediate and deteriorating devastating conditions in Gaza, the conflict will have long-term repercussions on food security.

The destruction of agricultural infrastructure—including cropland, greenhouses, and agricultural wells—has reached unprecedented levels due to razing, shelling, and other conflict-related pressures. The UN Satellite Centre (UNOSAT)'s data published in January 2025 suggests that approximately 75% of Gaza's cropland has been damaged¹¹. By the end of 2024, also 50% of agricultural wells and 90% of greenhouses had been damaged¹².

The potential for food production, now and in the future, has been so severely compromised, that it forces the population to urgently rely on humanitarian assistance, whilst humanitarian access is still severely restricted. The near-total collapse of the agricultural sector risks taking a toll on the population for years to come.

Humanitarian access in Sudan

The conflict that erupted in Sudan in April 2023 has led the population to “the worst possible levels of food insecurity the country has ever faced”, according to the latest IPC report¹³. Over 25 million people – more than half of the population of Sudan – face “crisis or worse” conditions of food insecurity. This includes over 8 million people on the brink of famine (IPC Phase 4) and over 750,000 people facing “catastrophe” levels of food insecurity.

14 areas, including parts of Greater Darfur, Greater Kordofan and Al Jazirah states, are facing the risk of famine. Two years into the conflict, 8.8 million people have been displaced. The influx of displaced population is putting great pressure on Chad and South Sudan, which currently host almost 2 million refugees.

Humanitarian access in Sudan has often been restricted by parties to the conflict. Aid organizations have been attacked, including, among many others, UN World Food Programme trucks, and their operations impeded. By September 2024, OCHA reported 73 access incidents since the beginning of the year, such as bureaucratic and operational impediments¹⁴. In 2025, such impediments keep rising. In February alone, 60% of visa applications were approved. Active fighting is leading some humanitarian partners to suspend operations in Zamzam camp¹⁵.

Tragically, 2024 has been the deadliest year ever recorded for aid workers in Sudan, with 54 deaths, and an unprecedented number of kidnappings and abductions¹⁶. The deliberate targeting of humanitarian operations, including humanitarian personnel, is regarded as using starvation as a weapon of war, therefore contravening IHL and UNSCR 2417. The lack of food and humanitarian aid lead to widespread food insecurity, severely impacting the population of Sudan.

In both these contexts, accountability towards perpetrators is lacking. UNSCR 2417 explicitly condemns violations of IHL described above. However, its implementation is far from successful. Specific UN sanctions, such as those against Sudan outlined by Resolution 2750¹⁷, and UNSC ceasefire resolutions, have not served as deterrents. As the number of people affected by conflict-induced hunger continues to rise, different stakeholders must act to ensure those responsible for IHL violations are held accountable.

Factsheet on UN Security Council Resolution 2417

In May 2018, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2417, which addresses the relationship between armed conflicts and food insecurity worldwide. UNSCR 2417 remains one of the main conceptual and legal frameworks that can drive action to prevent and respond to conflict-induced hunger. The resolution emphasizes:

1. The devastating humanitarian consequences of armed conflict and violence, which hinder an effective humanitarian response and contribute to the threat of famine
2. Concern over the escalation of armed conflict in different regions and the need to prevent and resolve them through diplomacy and regional agreements
3. A commitment to seek inclusive and sustainable solutions to address the underlying causes of armed conflicts and the need to break the cycle between armed conflict and food insecurity.
4. The many ways in which armed conflicts affect food security whether through land destruction, disruption of food supply systems or forced displacement of people. It also highlights the threat posed by landmines and explosives in affected areas
5. How armed conflicts disproportionately affect women, children, people with disabilities and the elderly.

The resolution urges all parties to a conflict to comply with their obligations under IHL and strongly condemns practices that drive hunger in conflict, particularly the use of starvation as a method of warfare.

UNSCR 2417 also has important accountability objectives. It strongly urges States to conduct investigations within their jurisdiction into IHL violations related to the use of starvation as a weapon of war and to act against perpetrators, following domestic and international law. It further urges those who may have influence over parties to a conflict - including third states - to remind them of their obligations under IHL, thus working to put an end and prevent further violations.

Reporting mechanisms for UNSCR 2417

UNSCR 2417 was initially conceived as a platform to create opportunities to raise awareness and enhance reporting on the impact of conflict on food security. There are three main reporting channels to the Security Council:

- UN Secretary General country-specific reports. They provide context-specific information and may cover issues of conflict-driven hunger
- UN Secretary General Annual Report on the protection of civilians. It is now a requirement to include a section on conflict-induced hunger
- White Papers. OCHA develops the early warning reports, or white papers, to flag the risk or early signs of famine in specific contexts and offer recommendations for Security Council action to prevent it. For the most part, their circulation is limited to Security Council Members.

More can be done to mainstream topics of conflict and hunger in the work of the Security Council, and to enhance country-specific analysis and recommendations. In particular, country-based actors should be more systematically consulted when developing white notes to ensure that recommendations to the UN Security Council are reflective of local realities and will address the drivers of conflict-induced hunger.

Lack of implementation of UNSCR 2417

Despite growing awareness of how conflict and hunger are intrinsically linked, significant gaps remain in translating evidence, advocacy and high-level commitments into effective action to prevent and respond to conflict-induced hunger. Political considerations often influence the

implementation of accountability measures, such as international prosecution or sanctions, thus limiting their effectiveness. A culture of impunity leads to violations against the civilian population.

Several challenges hinder the effective implementation of UNSCR 2417:

- *Ineffective ownership*: The resolution lacks a dedicated focal person within the UN system. Unlike the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) and the Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) agendas, there is no Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) specifically addressing conflict and hunger. While OCHA is the de facto lead on UNSCR 2417, political considerations can influence its appetite to proactively lead on this agenda
- *Insufficient awareness*: Knowledge of UNSCR 2417 remains low among governments, UN country teams, and civil society organisations. Reports often lack sufficient contextualisation and localisation, preventing effective follow-up actions at the country level and limiting meaningful conversations beyond restricted groups
- *Implementation gaps*: Partners outside of the New York and Geneva UN circles need more details on how the resolution can be operationalised and on the responsibility, process and stakeholders involved in the reporting process
- *Lack of preventative focus*: The resolution has not been leveraged through a prevention lens. Reports often reflect crises already occurring, rather than addressing emerging risks. Therefore, the resolution is often viewed as punitive rather than preventative
- *Weak response mechanisms*: The UN has limited tools to hold Member States to account for the unlawful conduct of hostilities, including attacks against civilians or destruction of objects indispensable for their survival. Political and security considerations often override humanitarian needs, leading to inadequate accountability measures. Both Gaza and Sudan highlight significant gaps in the enforcement of IHL. The lack of accountability and follow-up measures weakens deterrents and undermines the legitimacy of the ICC, ICJ and UNSCR 2417
- *Limited regional engagement*: organisations such as the African Union, European Union, IGAD or ECOWAS could play a greater role in regional efforts to prevent and mitigate conflict-induced hunger. Greater discussion is needed within these bodies on how to leverage UNSCR 2417
- *Cross-thematic approach*: UNSCR 2417 is an intrinsically complex resolution that links the humanitarian and the political spheres. However, it is often perceived as part of a solely humanitarian agenda. Therefore, diplomatic and political efforts may not always be part of the strategy adopted to address hunger caused by conflict.

Application of UNSCR 2417: Success stories

Whilst the operationalisation of UNSCR 2417 has been slow, the resolution was a norm-setting measure. It reinforces Customary International Law, International Humanitarian Law, International Criminal Law, Human Rights law, and States' commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the protection of civilians. Some examples include:

- UNSCR 2573 (April 2021)¹⁸: Unanimously adopted by the Security Council, it focuses on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. It condemns the starvation of civilians and urges parties to armed conflicts to ensure the proper functioning of food systems and markets
- Rome Statute Amendment (2019)¹⁹: Starvation in non-international armed conflicts was recognised as a war crime. By the end of 2024, 18 Member States, including Germany, Switzerland and The Netherlands, ratified the amendment at the national level

- Resolution 2428 on South Sudan (2018)²⁰: This resolution, passed after a White Paper briefing, acknowledged “conflict-induced food insecurity and the threat of famine” and imposed an arms embargo and targeted sanctions
- Resolution 2451 on Yemen (2018)²¹: Following the White Paper on Yemen, the Security Council Resolution explicitly called for the protection of objects indispensable to civilian survival.

Conclusion

The urgency of the Conflict and Hunger agenda demands collective and institutional action to hold perpetrators accountable. Progress, whilst limited, is possible, as the legal advances driven by UNSCR 2417 demonstrate. Strengthening the prevention aspect of the resolution, particularly through earlier, data-driven reporting on emerging risks, is essential to reducing civilian suffering. Consultative, locally-driven reports are key to effective recommendations. By bridging gaps in implementation, accountability measures, and awareness, stakeholders can make significant progress in minimizing hunger caused by conflict.

Endnotes

- 1 FSIN and Global Network Against Food Crises. (2024). Global Report on Food Crises 2024. Rome.
- 2 (Ibid)
- 3 UN General Assembly. (1948). Resolution 217A (III), Universal Declaration of Human Rights, A/RES/217(III). Art 25
- 4 United Nations Security Council. (2018). Resolution 2718, S/RES/2417 <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/2417>
- 5 For more information on this subject see Action Against Hunger's report: Action Against Hunger (2023). No matter who's fighting, hunger always wins. How violent actions drive food insecurity.
- 6 Art. 54(1) Additional Protocol I; art. 14 Additional Protocol II; ICRC Customary IHL Rule 53 <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule53>
- 7 Arts. 23, 55, 59 Fourth Geneva Convention; Art. 70 Additional Protocol I; Art. 18 Additional Protocol II; ICRC Customary IHL Rule 55 <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule55>
- 8 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). (1977). Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977. Art. 56 <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule56>
- 9 Ibid. Art. 54(2) https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule54#refFn_560A1CEA_00012
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- 14 OCHA (2024). Sudan Humanitarian Access Snapshot: September 2024. Available at: [https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/sudan/sudan-humanitarian-access-snapshot-september-2024#:~:text=The%20most%20frequently%20reported%20access.impediments%20\(26%20per%20cent](https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/sudan/sudan-humanitarian-access-snapshot-september-2024#:~:text=The%20most%20frequently%20reported%20access.impediments%20(26%20per%20cent)
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- 18 United Nations Security Council. (2021). Resolution 2573, S/RES/2573. <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/2573>
- 19 International Criminal Court (ICC). (2019). Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, amendment to article 8 to include starvation in non-international armed conflicts, ICC-ASP/18/Res.5, 7 December 2019.
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