

# **“What can we do?”:**

## **The role of parliamentarians in tackling conflict and hunger**

### **Introduction**

Parliamentarians, within or outside of governing political parties, can play a critical role in turning the tide on rising rates of conflict-driven hunger. They can hold governments accountable for problematic decisions, and they can table questions, debates, votes and legislation that help drive better policy, diplomatic action and resource allocation.

Parliamentarians whose party is currently represented in government can also use internal fora and party processes to ensure the topic of conflict-induced hunger is included in decisions. Parliamentarians in opposition parties can make use of their rights, such as the right to publicly question the government, to ensure transparency on what topics have been considered and how. All speeches made in parliament, committees or publicly on the topic of hunger and conflict can contribute to the overall awareness of the topic and its inclusion in all relevant decision-making processes.

### **What can parliamentarians do to advance the implementation of UNSCR 2417?**

#### **1. Legislate for and uphold international humanitarian law**

- *Ensure that International Humanitarian Law is transposed into domestic legislation.* This includes new developments, like the 2021 Amendment to the Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court (ICC) that makes the deliberate starvation of civilians in non-international armed conflicts (NIACs) a war crime. Most parties to the ICC have not yet transposed this into their domestic law, so there is an opportunity to table this in parliament
- *Hold governments to account.* When there is evidence of state-backed action that has led to the starvation of civilians or depriving civilians of objects indispensable to survival, ensure the state responsible is held accountable. This should include both direct and indirect actions contributing to the starvation of civilians. Holding governments accountable could mean sharing evidence through speeches and debates in Parliament and asking targeted questions of Ministers, challenging them to show how they are preventing or responding to potential IHL breaches.

#### **2. Advocate for upholding IHL**

- *Fund IHL mechanisms.* Ensure the government supports the work of and provides the necessary funding for humanitarian coordination mechanisms, such as HCTs and mechanism of civil-military coordination (CMCoord). These mechanisms are fundamental for ensuring safe and reliable humanitarian access
- *Embed the conflict and hunger agenda in relevant policies and strategies,* such as humanitarian responses and foreign affairs committees' agendas. If the government is developing new policies and plans that relate to this agenda, use your role in parliament to challenge the government on how it will ensure that the needs of communities affected by conflict-driven hunger are at the heart of policy-making

- *Uphold coherent policy and action.* Ensure the government is consistently applying the same interpretation of humanitarian law, as well as the same principles, in all contexts. Noting what countries the government applies humanitarian law most strictly to, challenge Ministers to apply the same standards and language in all contexts
- *Use your voice in parliament to push for high and sustained investment in peacebuilding and conflict prevention as a foreign policy priority.* Military budgets are increasingly dwarfing ODA spend - and military and security concerns may take away attention from humanitarian topics, and risk the politicisation of ODA. Governments need to be held accountable for their ODA investment; in a world with rising conflict, the global human development agenda, tackling humanitarian needs, and peacebuilding must be foreign and domestic policy priorities
- *Keep referencing UN Security Council Resolution 2417.* This is especially relevant in parliament in debates on specific crises, food security and global humanitarian crisis response.

### 3. Call for investment in peacebuilding, crisis prevention and response

- *Challenge Ministers* on their prioritisation of support to peace negotiations and the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Challenge them to use all the diplomatic channels available to them to reduce conflict and its avoidable heavy toll on civilians?
- *Align budgets.* Press your government to ensure the ODA or domestic budgets are aligned with a goal to address the structural causes of crises or vulnerability, such as lack of social protection, and to ensure spending decisions recognise the inherent uncertainty of operating in crises, so are flexible and long term
- *Call for funding.* When voting on budget laws, demand sufficient allocation of funds to address emergencies, as well as long-term hunger crises. Ensure humanitarian topics – including, but not limited to, conflict-induced hunger – are being taken into consideration and given appropriate weight in budget allocation debates.

### 4. Promote coherent cross-government decision-making

- *Ensure decisions are consistent with IHL.* Examine if the government has the structures in place to ensure decisions made by all departments are coherent with a commitment to upholding IHL and reducing conflict-driven hunger. For example, governments must ensure that trade and export decisions are consistent with the decisions made by diplomatic Ministries. Call for committees or joint units that strengthen coherence across government
- *Promote cross-party committees or working groups.* Groups allowing the use of special rights of questioning, accessing government information or promoting recommendations (such as scrutiny committees, working committees, and enquiry commissions) are especially useful. Such cross-party participation lends particular credibility by showing a broad concern for the issue.

## Conclusion

Parliamentarians, either in the government party or in opposition, can play an extensive role in promoting the visibility of conflict-induced hunger, ensuring integrity, and holding the government to account. It is important not to underestimate the impact that relentless scrutiny and sustained awareness of the topic can have on government actions and priorities.