

“What can we do?”:

The role of regional bodies in tackling conflict and hunger

Introduction

As hunger driven by conflict soars globally, regional government bodies have a crucial role to play in addressing some of the ongoing limitations in accountability, upholding International Humanitarian Law, and progressing the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2417. Article 52(1) of the UN Charter¹ explicitly recognises that regional arrangements or agencies can play a significant role in maintaining international peace and security.

In a context where Security Council members often exercise their veto power - as shown over the last decade in the wars in Syria, Ukraine and the conflict in Israel and occupied Palestinian territory - it is crucial to consider other effective actors. Regional bodies could enhance their potential to strengthen accountability under UNSCR 2417. They can integrate this agenda into existing governance structures and meetings, engage with reporting mechanisms, provide training and capacity building, and reinforce international advocacy and diplomatic efforts.

What can regional bodies do to advance the implementation of UNSCR 2417?

1. Utilise and support the development of monitoring and early warning systems:

- *Monitor conflict and food insecurity.* Establish, or leverage existing regional early warning systems to track signs of conflict and food crises
- *Share data.* Closely monitor early warning systems, and use the data to mobilise political and diplomatic action. Especially when a crisis encompasses several countries in a region, ensure that there is prompt, integrated information sharing to enable timely and coherent action.

2. Create legal mechanisms and policies to uphold International Humanitarian Law

- *Ensure that International Humanitarian Law, UNSCR 2417 and UNSCR 2761 are transposed into regional and national legislation.* Regional bodies can support this by articulating a regional framework that guides Member States in integrating international legal principles, including IHL, into their national laws and regulations
- *Hold perpetrators to account.* Monitor and condemn instances where starvation is used as a method of war – privately if necessary, but publicly when possible. Support investigations and accountability mechanisms
- *Embed the Protection of Civilians agenda in relevant policies, such as regional and national humanitarian strategies.* Where possible and relevant in different contexts, ensure coherence and cohesion across Member States' strategies.

3. Raise awareness and build capacity on the conflict and hunger agenda

- *Train civil servants on International Humanitarian Law and on UNSCR 2417.* Ensure a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes a violation, as well as how to collect evidence and report critical contexts, with a particular focus on prevention

- *Ensure that the reporting and accountability mechanisms are clear* and that encompass local, national and regional actors, as well as cross-thematic considerations.

4. Foster regional coordination

- *Enhance humanitarian diplomacy.* Reinforce coordination among regional Member States by developing joint humanitarian diplomacy strategies to address issues of Protection of Civilians, conflict and hunger, and humanitarian access.
- *Leverage existing regional coordination mechanisms.* Use existing platforms as well-established mechanisms to foster knowledge and implementation of the resolution. For example, conflict and hunger can be a standard agenda point in regular meetings, or be integrated in early warning systems
- *Facilitate cross-border humanitarian aid.* If necessary, facilitate cross-border agreements to enable the distribution of food, and in particular aid assistance, to conflict-affected areas
- *Enable cross-thematic engagement.* Often, conflict and hunger are discussed in isolation - conflict belongs to the political sphere, and hunger to the humanitarian or food security conversation. In their coordination capacity, regional bodies can ensure that the relevant connections are made, and different departments engage on this agenda to analyse and tackle the impact of conflict on food insecurity.

5. Foster international coordination

- *Undertake strategic partnerships.* Collaborate with relevant UN agencies to promote the implementation of UNSCR 2417. For example, as the penholder on this agenda, OCHA can facilitate the compilation of reports to the UN Secretary General. WFP and FAO, as agencies with a mandate specific to food and food systems, could support the training of staff, data collection, and reporting.

Conclusion

Regional government bodies have a critical role in implementing UNSCR 2417 and addressing the links between conflict and hunger. By fostering regional and international collaboration, promoting and enforcing international humanitarian law, supporting humanitarian access, and monitoring and addressing the root causes of food insecurity, they can contribute to breaking the cycle of violence and starvation. Through transparent accountability mechanisms, regional bodies can contribute to ensuring that civilians are protected in conflict-affected areas.

Endnotes

- 1 United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, Article 52(1), 24 October 1945.