

## Oxfam's input to the Special Rapporteur on the right to food

### “Human Rights and Starvation, with an Emphasis on the Palestinian People’s Food Sovereignty”

14 June 2024

In response to the Special Rapporteur on the right to food’s [call for input](#) for a thematic report on human rights and starvation, with an emphasis on the Palestinian People’s Food Sovereignty, Oxfam is pleased to provide input on a number of the [questions](#) raised.

#### The root causes of food insecurity in places where there is a high risk of famine or catastrophic levels of food insecurity

Acute food crises are often the result of [multiple drivers](#) feeding into one another (from conflict to climate to economic factors). Despite the interplay of the drivers, they are always a reflection of political failure – whether from deliberate deprivation or from prolonged inaction. People are never just “starving”; [they are being starved](#).

When famine was declared in South Sudan in 2017, and major risks of famine arose simultaneously in Nigeria and Yemen, the [common factors](#) were armed conflict, widespread insecurity and restricted access to civilian populations. At the same time, in Somalia, the root cause was drought and weak governance after years of conflict.

In 2023, conflict and insecurity were the [primary driver](#) of acute food insecurity in 20 countries. Oxfam regularly witnesses how armed conflict [drives the economy into the ground](#), making food and other essential goods unaffordable. All too often, however, food insecurity is directly impacted by conflict with starvation being used as a weapon of war. Humanitarian actors are alert to risks of catastrophic hunger, but regularly encounter access constraints as militaries employ tactics of blockade and besiegement, denying civilians basic rights including their right to assistance.

#### Actions of solidarity and care provided to the Palestinian people

Oxfam has been working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory since the 1950s, working closely with partner organizations to offer lifesaving support and to tackle the root causes of inequality and poverty, such as the Israeli military occupation.<sup>1</sup> Despite Israel’s ongoing besiegement and [deliberate blocking of aid](#) to Gaza, as of May 2024, Oxfam and local partners have been able to reach 335,000 people in Gaza with aid and support, including cash and voucher distributions, protection kits, food kits and water, sanitation and hygiene equipment.

In addition to its humanitarian response on the ground, Oxfam has sought to demonstrate solidarity with the Palestinian people by speaking truth to power in the face of injustice. On 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023, Oxfam [warned](#) that Israel was using [starvation as a weapon of war](#) after it had announced a “total siege” on 9<sup>th</sup> October.<sup>i</sup> This siege is reinforced by the IDF’s total destruction of Gaza’s agricultural capacity, including the port and prohibiting fishing, water wells, production facilities and infrastructures. Oxfam was one of the first civil society organizations to call for a ceasefire, with

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<sup>1</sup> The occupation has had direct impacts especially on food insecurity through land and water resource grabbing, the denial of access for Palestinians to their land, the creation of Israeli settlements, and other actions.

800 more organizations following suit. As a ceasefire was not being enforced, despite global calls and an eventual UN Security Council resolution, Oxfam, along with 250 other organizations, [called upon third states to halt their transfers of weapons](#) to Israel.

### **How human rights can provide a way of generating “early warning” to prevent starvation**

There is a plethora of systems in place to warn of the risks of acute food insecurity and starvation. Reflecting on decades of humanitarian action in the Horn of Africa, Oxfam and Save the Children have warned in the [Dangerous Delay series](#) that the problem of cyclical food insecurity is a lack of political will and early action. National governments and the international community have [agreed](#) that duty bearers have been failing to address the underlying conditions causing food insecurity.

Rights-based approaches are essential to addressing those underlying conditions. States have a legal obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food. Human rights frameworks, when implemented, protect against discrimination, inequality and any risk of starvation. The indivisibility and interdependence of human rights are critical as communities’ civil and political rights are essential to preventing starvation.

Having seen repeated failures in the implementation of UNSCR 2417, it is clear that [local human rights actors can play a key role](#) in reporting on the risks of conflict-induced hunger and demanding appropriate actions. Human rights movements will similarly be critical to demanding accountability and redress for the use of starvation as a weapon of war.

### **The international institutional changes necessary to avoid political failures related to starvation**

Oxfam welcomes the Special Rapporteur exploring the international institutional changes that are necessary to prevent starvation and recommends that actions are taken to:

- Ensure the international peace/security architecture is fit for purpose, especially to prevent international crimes, including the use of starvation as a weapon of war;
- Strengthen international accountability mechanisms to combat impunity and deter the use of starvation as a weapon of war;
- Ensure meaningful early warning and action long before warnings of “famine” to prevent acute hunger; and
- Mainstream a Triple Nexus approach (across peace, development, and humanitarian action) in a way that fully supports human rights, particularly the right to food.

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<sup>i</sup> This analysis was referenced in [South Africa’s application](#) instituting proceedings against Israel concerning alleged violations by Israel of its obligations under the genocide Convention at the International Court of Justice.