

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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UN: Don't ignore human rights in food crisis

Mr. President,

Amnesty International welcomes the convening of the Human Rights Council's first thematic special session on the world food crisis.

We believe that the world food crisis is a global human rights emergency that has been fuelled by violations of human rights, including the right to adequate food. It is crucial that the international community respond swiftly to ensure adequate food to prevent hunger, and to identify and address the underlying causes of growing food insecurity.

We remind the Council of the millions of people who face food insecurity and hunger as a direct result of human rights violations. The organisation has documented discrimination, the political manipulation of food distribution, obstruction of necessary humanitarian assistance and other human rights violations leading to mass hunger in a range of countries including, in particular, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (notably in the Gaza strip), Myanmar, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan (Darfur), and Zimbabwe.

In Gaza, the current crisis has exacerbated the already dire living conditions of the 1.5 million Palestinian population resulting from the Israeli-imposed blockade which hinders access to food and the passage of other essential goods, including medical supplies and humanitarian assistance.

Amnesty International also expresses its serious concern at the continued obstruction by the government of Myanmar of necessary humanitarian assistance to hundreds of thousands of people who are on the brink of starvation and life

threatening diseases as a consequence of a natural disaster. The organisation has reported on the impact of arbitrary food requisitioning on food security over many years and is particularly concerned at recent reports of continued rice exports at a time when a large portion of the population is facing the prospect of death by starvation.

We also draw the attention of the Human Rights Council to a series of reports we have received concerning the excessive use of force and other human rights violations by some States while responding to food riots and protests and against human rights defenders, including in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti, Egypt, and Senegal. Where “food hoarding” is a serious issue that requires state action, states must respond within the human rights framework.

The current food crisis requires concerted action by UN member States through increased and effective international cooperation within the framework of international human rights law and standards. The obligation of international cooperation requires all states in a position to do so to provide assistance to other states that seek it and would otherwise be unable to meet their ‘minimum core obligations’ to ensure that the population is free from hunger. States must also ensure that their policies do not infringe on the enjoyment of the right to food in other countries and must cooperate to facilitate access to food. At the national level, States should comply with their immediate obligation to ensure that adequate food is available and accessible to combat hunger and to prioritise the most vulnerable, requesting international assistance where necessary to ensure freedom from hunger.

We support the call made in the joint statement submitted by Food First Information Network (FIAN) to ensure that the promotion and protection of human rights are at the centre of all international efforts to find solutions to the food crisis.

The Human Rights Council can also itself and through its mechanisms play a vital role in ensuring that human rights are respected in the response to the global food crisis and that the violations at the root of the current crisis are recognised and addressed.

Amnesty International therefore urges the Human Rights Council to:

- Investigate the role that national and international policies and human rights violations, including discriminatory or politically motivated access to food, have played in creating or deepening food insecurity in different countries;
- Call on all states to ensure that human rights are respected in any steps taken to respond to the current food crisis;
- Call on all states to ensure that international cooperation and assistance is adequate to address the effects of the food crisis and fully respects human rights;

- Urge states to fully cooperate with the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, including by responding promptly and in full to his urgent appeals, communications and requests for visits, and by giving positive consideration to his recommendations; and
- Call on all states to ensure that any responses to protests or riots are strictly proportionate and otherwise respect human rights and that allegations of human rights violations are promptly and fully investigated, with disciplinary and criminal proceedings as appropriate to the gravity of the offence.

The convening of this special session should be the beginning of engagement by the Human Rights Council on this issue.