

# ActionAid Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food's Call for Inputs on Human Rights and Starvation

## About ActionAid:

ActionAid is a global federation striving for a world free from poverty and injustice. We envision a just, fair, and sustainable world where everyone enjoys a life of dignity and freedom from poverty and oppression. We aim to achieve social justice and gender equality, and to eradicate poverty.

Our strategy involves building international momentum for social, economic, and environmental justice, driven by people living in poverty and exclusion. In practice, this entails working closely with those living in poverty and exclusion, civil society organisations, social movements, and supporters. Together, we deliver grassroots programmes, provide emergency relief, and campaign for issues such as women's economic rights, tax justice, and climate justice.

We believe in the power of people. By supporting individuals to know, claim, and defend their rights, we can create a fairer world. For ActionAid, responding to this call for inputs is crucial as a solidarity based movement. It underscores our commitment to supporting affected communities and addressing systemic injustices that perpetuate poverty and suffering. By advocating for Palestinian rights and contributing to the global discourse on starvation and food insecurity, we reaffirm our dedication to creating a more just and equitable world.

## ActionAid Submission:

### **What are the root causes of food insecurity in places where this is currently a high risk of famine?**

Global and national political priorities and power dynamics determine the severity and impact of food insecurity. While conflicts and climate shocks might accelerate food insecurity, the story in East and Central Africa, Afghanistan, Haiti, Sudan, Gaza and many other countries have much in common as it is affected by historical patterns of exploitation, colonialism, occupation and political failures, affecting the most vulnerable and marginalised.

Key food insecurity drivers such as conflict, occupation, climate change and cost of living are interlinked. Food insecurity in Gaza didn't start on 7th October 2023. Over decades, restrictions on Palestinians to access their land have hampered agricultural practices, limiting economic development and self-sufficiency. Limited access to clean water has further undermined agricultural productivity. The illegal blockade imposed by Israel since 2007 has severely restricted the movement of people and goods and led to 80% of Gaza's population being dependent on international aid.

The relentless bombardments on Gaza since October 2023 has added fuel to fire, causing apocalyptic destruction to infrastructure essential for food production, including agricultural lands, fishing fleets, livestock, and production and distribution networks. The military offensive has also polluted water sources and the soil and destroyed trees and ecosystems, causing a long-lasting environmental crisis. Human Right Watch reported in November 2023 that Israel is using starvation as a method of warfare<sup>i</sup>. Decades of political failure by the international community to address Israel's violations of Palestinian human rights has now cumulated in the most rapid acceleration of hunger and starvation ever seen in any population whereby famine is imminent in North Gaza and Gaza Governorates and the south of the strip is at risk of stepping into famine<sup>ii</sup>.

**Dawud, who lives in the north of Gaza, said<sup>iii</sup>:** *"The situation is very tragic. There are no necessities for life, no flour, no rice, no vegetables, nothing. The big problem is that it is difficult to explain to children that there is no food, no water to drink, nothing..."*

*"People started thinking about eating animals. They finished eating animal fodder and now they started eating animals. Yesterday I heard news that some people slaughtered a horse and ate it. People are unable to provide any food for their family. People have begun to wish for death. There are children who have died of hunger."*

Despite global citizen calls for an immediate ceasefire, lack of political will from major states like the US, the UK and most of the EU have hindered progress towards an end to the war and led to the catastrophic food security situation currently witnessed in Gaza.

To break the world-wide escalating cycle of acute food insecurity in Gaza and elsewhere, political leaders must take bold action to prioritise promoting peace, justice and accountability. International cooperation and humanitarian assistance are essential components of addressing acute food insecurity, but they must be complemented by long-term political strategies aimed at addressing the root causes of injustice, occupation, conflict, and vulnerability to build stability and self-determination, including around food sovereignty, and lasting resilience to future shocks and crisis. Achieving this requires political will. Only then can we hope to prevent future famines and build a more just and sustainable world for all.

**What actions of solidarity and care are you providing the Palestinian people? Please explain why this work is an act of solidarity.**

For ActionAid's solidarity includes providing material, moral, and other forms of support to communities, people's organisations and social movements as well as engaging in collective action<sup>iv</sup>. ActionAid's own actions of solidarity and care for the Palestinian people include several specific efforts aimed at providing tangible support and raising awareness about their plight and rights:

## Humanitarian Aid and Support

ActionAid's most direct ways to show solidarity with the Palestinian people is through humanitarian aid. This involves providing essential resources to our civil society partners to deliver vital aid such as food, NFIs, and medical supplies in Gaza and the West Bank. ActionAid response as of 3rd June 2024 included:

- **Food Distribution:** 80,911 people in Gaza and 1,200 individuals in the West Bank (Jenin area) received food parcels.
- **Non-Food Items:** 5,750 people received hygiene kits and clothing in Rafah and Al Nuseirat.
- **WASH:** 20,000 people benefited from latrine facilities in Rafah, including 60 WASH units for women in 20 shelters.
- **Protection:** 4,150 women and children received support, with 650 children participating in wellbeing activities.
- **Cash Assistance:** 1,163 families (6,978 people) received multi-purpose cash assistance.
- **Health:** 70,000 people were reached with health and medical services in Al Nuseirat hospital and Rafah.
- **Shelter:** 2,000 people received shelter support, including tents for the recently displaced.

The Gaza Strip remains in a state of emergency due to escalating aggression across the region, particularly in the northern and southern areas. Recent developments have seen a serious and intense ground invasion in Rafah, leading to significant civilian casualties. The Israeli's ground invasion of Rafah has forced a pause on all our partners' activities in Rafah. Our partner, Wafaq Society for Women and Children's Care has suspended all its activities in Rafah due to the increased violence and the resulting displacement of staff and rightsholders.

Our response in Gaza has been severely limited in recent weeks due to the lack of safety and security, as well as Israel's severe restrictions on aid access. These challenges hinder our efforts and exacerbate the food insecurity crisis in Gaza. The inability to deliver aid safely and efficiently leaves many in dire need, further complicating an already critical situation.

## **Advocacy and Campaign:**

Another significant aspect of solidarity in ActionAid involves advocacy and raising awareness about the Palestinian cause. ActionAid has actively utilised policy and advocacy to call for an end to the violence in Gaza. Since October 2023, ActionAid federation members have engaged in numerous advocacy meetings with their respective governments, urging them to pressure Israel to cease hostilities and facilitate aid access. These efforts are crucial in addressing the catastrophic food insecurity in Gaza, as the continued conflict and restricted access severely impede the delivery of essential humanitarian aid. Additionally, ActionAid has joined various campaigns and coalitions calling for a ceasefire, sanctions on Israel, and suspension of arms sales. ActionAid also joined in legal actions against states supplying arms to Israel, including suing the Danish National Police and Ministry of Foreign Affairs to halt Danish arms exports, ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law.

ActionAid believes that joint solidarity action and political pressure through sanctions, and suspending arms sales are crucial to tackling food insecurity in Gaza. Continuous conflict and violence disrupt food production and distribution, leading to severe shortages and humanitarian crises. Ceasefires would allow for the safe delivery of aid, sanctions can pressure actors to comply with international law, and halting arms sales reduces the tools of violence. These political actions are vital to creating an environment where humanitarian efforts can effectively address and mitigate food insecurity.

## **What should be done to enhance the Palestinian People's food sovereignty and how can Palestinian peasants, small-scale fishers, pastoralists and small food producers be supported?**

Food sovereignty is a critical aspect of self-determination and resilience, particularly for communities that face systemic oppression and land dispossession. For the Palestinian people, achieving food sovereignty means gaining control over their own food production systems, ensuring access to healthy and culturally appropriate food, and protecting their agricultural heritage. However, the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is marred by a series of violations against the rights of the Palestinian people, perpetrated by the state of Israel. These violations encompass a wide range of actions, including land confiscation, denial of the right to water, military occupation, denial of freedom of movement, settlement expansion, demolition of Palestinian homes and infrastructure, displacement, and human rights abuses, all of which have had profound and enduring consequences for Palestinian communities and their food security and sovereignty. The blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza since 2007 has further exacerbated food insecurity, with severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods, leading to shortages of essential supplies such as food, medicine, and fuel, and stifling economic development.

**Samar is an olive farmer from Nablus Governate who has been prevented from accessing his harvest. He said<sup>vii</sup>:**

*"[The] area is about [200,000 square metres]. It contains 1,860 fruitful olive trees, [that are] 70 years' old. The attacks on this piece of land have been occurring since [the year] 2000. Now in 2023, access to [the land] is completely prohibited. Israelis claim that because of the security situation, even watching it from the village or getting close to the land puts us in danger. More than once they shot [at] us. The land produces approximately three tons of oil [and] eight tons of olives. In 2019 and in 2013, [the land] was burned and trees were destroyed. This year, as [we farmers] say, agriculturally, it is a diamond year. [But] they have prohibited [us] from entering [the land] to [harvest] the [olives]."*

Enhancing Palestinian People's Food Sovereignty requires both political and economic independence, along with unrestricted movement for Palestinians to access their land, resources, and engage in trade with other countries.

Denying Palestinians their right to self-determination hampers their ability to achieve food security and sovereignty. Political and economic independence is crucial for Palestinians to access their land, resources, produce healthy food centred on locally available and natural resources and inputs derived from their agricultural heritage, and engage in trade with other countries. Without political autonomy, Palestinians face barriers to implementing effective and sustainable food security and sovereignty strategies tailored to their needs and circumstances. Economic self-sufficiency reduces reliance on external aid and trade and allows to set domestic policies promoting small hold farmers and agroecology models. This ensures stability, equity and sustainability in food production and distribution. Additionally, restrictions on movement imposed by Israeli authorities limit Palestinians' ability to cultivate their land, access water sources, and engage in commerce, undermining their food security and economic well-being. Therefore, denying Palestinians their right to self-determination perpetuates their dependence on external aid and on Israel's export-oriented (75% exported to the European Union) agricultural methods, work opportunities and intrants. This exacerbates their vulnerability to food insecurity and curtails their right to food.

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For any questions and further discussion, please email Ziad Issa, Head of Humanitarian and Climate Policy at ActionAid UK, at [ziad.issa@actionaid.org](mailto:ziad.issa@actionaid.org).  
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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/18/israel-starvation-used-weapon-war-gaza>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1156872/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://stories.actionaid.org/?c=65812&k=c862cdf50b>

<sup>iv</sup> [https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/strategy\\_2028\\_lr.pdf](https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/strategy_2028_lr.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> <https://actionaid.org/news/2024/actionaids-partner-organisation-rafah-forced-halt-services-after-staff-displaced>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://actionaid.org/news/2024/ngos-sue-danish-state-stop-arms-exports-israel>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://actionaid.org/news/2023/ancient-tradition-olive-harvesting-under-attack-west-bank>