

Joint Statement occasion of World Food Day and the Syria Crisis

16 October 2021 – On this World Food Day, we express our concern over the widespread and growing hunger in Syria. Ten years of devastating crisis, the recent severe economic decay, and COVID-19 have already pushed over 12 million people into food insecurity. This has been only further compounded by climate factors: Syria is one of nine countries considered at ‘very high risk’ of extreme climatic events, and the third highest at risk of drought. The UN warns that without urgent action, millions of more people living in Syria today are at risk of going hungry.

While food insecurity in Syria stems from years of conflict and displacement, it is now also driven by a deteriorating economy. Across the country, food prices have risen stratospherically. As families across Syria face growing levels of poverty, many are forced to make difficult choices. More and more people are eating less, forgoing their own meals to feed other family members, or even sending their children to work, so that they can merely survive.

Climate factors are further compounding this plight. The UN has already sounded the alarm over the recent water crisis and drought-like conditions affecting the country, in particular in the north and north-east. Poor and erratic rainfall critical for crop development and warmer-than-average temperatures have hit important harvests in several governorates. Around 40 per cent of the irrigated agricultural areas are no longer able to count on water availability.

When coupled with existing damage and neglect of farmlands and irrigation systems following years of conflict, in addition to the rising costs of already scarce inputs necessary for production, the consequences are disastrous and long-lasting. In the worst affected areas, farmers are simply abandoning their land and selling their livestock. This not only erases their income and livelihood prospects, it further drives up local food costs and shortages, impacting entire communities.

With more than 60 per cent of the population already unable to guarantee access to safe, nutritious and adequate food - and an additional 1.8 million at risk of sliding into hunger - urgent assistance must immediately be scaled-up to avert further suffering. However, humanitarian assistance alone will not be sufficient to safeguard people from hunger. The food security outlook for Syria depends on a wide range of social, environmental, and economic factors. Investments in programmes for resilient and cost-efficient food systems are critically needed.

The UN and partners have been working together on the rehabilitation of agricultural production assets and infrastructure such as water systems and irrigation facilities. It also remains a paramount objective to help farmers better manage agricultural production, by enhancing their access to quality inputs and markets, as well as strengthening early warning systems to improve coping with the various agricultural risks and natural disasters.

On this World Food Day, we stress that it is simply unacceptable that so many in Syria today go hungry. Solutions can be found, but it will take a concerted, collective effort, with judicious and principled investment. Without food security, the prospects for future generations of Syria will remain bleak. For their sake, and for those who have already suffered so much, it is imperative we do more to ensure all people in Syria can access their right to food.

Signatories

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