

UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Michael Fakhri

The Palestinian People's Food Sovereignty
UN HRC Side-Event

6 March 2024, 12:00 – 1:00 pm
Room XXVII, Palais de Nations

Opening Remarks

Today, we are at a unique moment within the history of the Palestinian people's struggle for liberation and self-determination. But in many ways this moment is also continuation of the 2021 Unity Intifada, which was an incredible expression of Palestinian self-determination. The 2021 Unity Intifada was a powerful moment when Palestinians united together regardless of whether they were Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories, whether they were 1948 Palestinians, of whether they lived in the diaspora. The fragmentation and undermining of Palestinian self-determination began in 1948 with the creation of Israel as a settler colony. It has gotten worse ever since then as Israel's apartheid regime continues to unfold.

In Gaza today, we are witnessing how Israel is using starvation as one of its tools to commit genocide. We have never seen a civilian population made to go hungry so quickly and completely compared to any other place in the world in modern history. Now, children are starting to die from malnutrition and dehydration which indicates that famine is already striking Gaza or famine is around the corner. We have never seen children pushed into malnutrition so quickly anywhere else in the world.

How did this happen?

Israel is not only restricting and blocking the flow of humanitarian aid. It is targeting and destroying the food system in Gaza, making it impossible for people to feed themselves now and very difficult for people to feed themselves in the future. Israel is decimating and poisoning agricultural land, and orchards. Israel has destroyed approximately 75% of the fishing fleets of small fishers in Gaza.

When you examine the situation in terms of Palestinian people's food sovereignty, you get a better understanding what is at stake. You also get a better sense for how to use human rights to create the conditions for peace and life of dignity for all peoples who live between the Jordan river and Mediterranean Sea. The reason Israel could make 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza go hungry so quickly and completely is because Israel was already strangling Gaza through a 17-year blockade, keeping everyone on the precipice of hunger. Before the war 50% of people in Gaza were food insecure and 80% relied on humanitarian aid.

But Israel's attacks against the Palestinian people and attempts to undermine their food sovereignty is not only restricted to Gaza. Last year and now going into this year, we are seeing

record degrees of violence by Israeli settlers and Israeli armed forces against Palestinians in occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

There is an escalation of attacks against Palestinian peasants and pastoralists. This year, peasants were not able to harvest their olives in the West Bank. Olives are of course an important source of food and livelihood. But the Palestinian people's relationship to olive trees, which can live for hundreds of years, is about the Palestinian people's relationship to their land, to their ancestors, and to their future.

The olive tree is one central aspect of what it means to be Palestinian and Palestinian food sovereignty. I will add that small-scale fishing and access to the Mediterranean Sea is another central aspect of Palestinian food sovereignty.

As reflected in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, food sovereignty is deeply interconnected to the right to food. One way to think about food sovereignty is as a particular articulation of a people's right to self-determination.

The power and authority of food sovereignty does not derive from the political form of the State or a national authority. Food sovereignty arises from people's long-standing relationship with the land, with the rivers and the sea, and their ability to feed their own communities. Food sovereignty is about securing collective tenure and territorial rights. Since food sovereignty is inherently linked to human rights, all States have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfill those collective tenure and territorial rights.

Today, when we are talking about the Palestinian people's food sovereignty, we are in effect talking about how to make the Palestinian people stronger.

My warmest thank you to the co-sponsors of this event: Ireland, Qatar, Pakistan, and the State of Palestine. We will begin with opening remarks from:

- Ambassador Noel White from Ireland,
- Ambassador Hend Abdelrahman Al-Muftah from Qatar,
- Ambassador Bilal Ahmad from Pakistan.

We will then hear from our panel:

Yasmeen El-Hassan is a representative from the Union of Agricultural Work Committees in Ramallah. She will provide a perspective from Palestinian peasants.

Ahmed Abofoul is a legal researcher from Al-Haq, a Ramallah-based human rights organization. He will provide the broader international legal context of Palestine and the Palestinian people's liberation struggle.






Kinda Mohamadieh is a Legal Advisor with Third World Network and will discuss the role of corporations in the occupation of Palestinian territories. As the right to food community knows all too well, corporate power is one of the greatest threats to food sovereignty.

And then Ambassador Ibrahim Khraishi from the State of Palestine will provide concluding remarks.

UN Human Rights Council 55th session - Side Event

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-  12:00 - 13:00 CET
-  Room XXVII
Palais des Nations
Geneva
-  In English
-  [Click here to register](#)

Moderator

Prof. Michael Fakhri
UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

Opening Remarks

H.E. Mr Noel White
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN

H.E. Mrs Hend Abdulrahman Al-Muftah
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the UN

H.E. Mr Bilal Ahmad
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN

Panellists

Ms. Yasmeen El-Hasan
Representative, Union of Agricultural Work Committees, Ramallah (West Bank)

Mr Ahmed Abofoul
Legal Researcher, Al-Haq, Human Rights NGO, Ramallah (West Bank)

Ms. Kinda Mohamadieh
Legal Advisor, Third World Network

Concluding Remarks

H.E. Mr Ibrahim Khraishi
Ambassador, Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the UN