Local Perspectives on the Protection of Civilians:

The Impact of Conflict and Hunger

Date: Tuesday, May 25th
Time: 0800 – 9:30 EST / 1400 - 1530 CET

Background

The 2021 Global Humanitarian Overview projects a historic level of food insecurity, with famine looming in several countries due in large part to conflict. In 2021, the United Nations raised the alarm that 34 million people around the world are on the brink of famine, where the slightest shock can tip hundreds of thousands into starvation, in particular women and girls who represent 60% of those most food insecure.

While climate and economic shocks, particularly those related to the COVID-19 pandemic, can be driving factors, conflict remains at the heart of increasing acute food insecurity. Among conflict-affected populations, food insecurity significantly impacts the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, particularly agriculture infrastructure and food systems. The vulnerability created where conflict and food insecurity persist pose a fundamental challenge to reducing harm to civilians and protecting them from violence, exploitation, and abuse.

Armed conflict often induces entirely preventable hunger crises, through sieges, blockades, and attacks on objects indispensable to the survival of the population. In Yemen, the weakness of the Yemeni economy and ever-increasing inflation means the average Yemeni cannot afford food, even when there is enough supply. In Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Sahel and South Sudan, conflict and insecurity routinely disrupt agricultural and food production cycles, markets and trade, leaving communities without any source of food despite living on or having access to otherwise resource-rich, productive and abundant land. Access constraints for humanitarians has resulted in an increase of food insecurity, due to the often limited and/or hindered access to the most vulnerable populations. Famine and food insecurity intensify protection risks, as women and children become more vulnerable and are increasingly exposed to physical threats; family separation; further marginalisation; gender-based violence, including sexual abuse and exploitation; and attacks as they search for food, water, and access to medical care. In some contexts, hunger can also become a cause of conflict, driving recruitment to armed groups and pushing localised grievances to balloon into much larger and more complex conflicts.
Recognising the devastating yet preventable linkages between conflict and hunger, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2417 in 2018. This resolution reinforced the Council’s commitment to address conflict-induced food insecurity, including famine. The resolution recalled the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols, reaffirmed the need for all to respect humanitarian principles, and reaffirmed the need for parties to armed conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. The resolution made clear the importance of safe, timely and unimpeded access of humanitarian personnel to civilians in armed conflicts and set out a mechanism to raise an early warning as a means of prevention.

In September 2020, early warnings were raised to the UN Security Council for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, northeast Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen. Member States have since made political commitments and taken actions to address conflict-induced hunger and prevent looming famine, followed by the UN Security Council Open Debate on Conflict and Food Security in March, actions through the G7, and the announcement by the Secretary-General of the formation of a UN High Level Task Force on Famine Prevention. These milestones demonstrate the moment of the agenda but more so the critical need for urgent action.

Tackling the root causes of conflicts that drive hunger, or preventing famine induced by conflict where food insecurity may be simultaneously a driver and product of that conflict is a complex task. As momentum gains across the international community to find solutions, it is critical that the voices of those most directly impacted by conflict-induced hunger have a platform to share their experiences and perspectives to inform political actions, humanitarian response, development initiatives and peacebuilding priorities. Additionally, given that women and children are disproportionately affected by conflict-induced hunger, are more vulnerable to negative coping strategies in these contexts (e.g., early, child, and forced marriage), and as there is a direct correlation between food scarcity and spiking protection risks, it is critical that key gender and protection concerns are kept at the forefront of these discussions and all response activities.

The Governments of the Dominican Republic, Niger, the United States and the United Kingdom together with the World Food Programme, Action Against Hunger, Oxfam, World Vision and the International Committee of the Red Cross will convene this event to bring forth a unique lens to the discussion, by providing a platform to those who have personally experienced the intersection of conflict and food insecurity, and give space to reflect on their recommendations for better enhancing civilian protection and protection of critical infrastructure.

**Format**

A virtual interactive round-table dialogue with panelists reflecting on their experiences across a diversity of conflict-affected contexts impacted by food insecurity, from the personal to the operational, sharing their unique views on how conflict and hunger impact civilian protection and what urgent actions are needed now.
Speakers:

- Ms. Anne-Marie Connor, National Director- World Vision Democratic Republic of Congo
- Ms. Ayey Madut Ring, Health Project Manager- South Sudanese HealthCare Foundation Organization
- Mr. Abdi Ismail Isse, Head of Mission Aden- International Committee of the Red Cross Yemen
- Ms. Mary-Ellen McGroarty, Country Director - World Food Programme Afghanistan

RSVP: This event will be held virtually via Zoom. Register here to receive the Zoom link. For further information kindly contact Lyndsay Hockin (lyndsay_hockin@wvi.org) or Brett Hanley (brett.hanley@wfp.org).