

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 55th SESSION

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right to food

7 March 2024

Michael Fakhri, Special Rapporteur on the right to food, emphasized on the indispensable role of small-scale fishers, fish workers, and Indigenous Peoples in coastal communities for global food security and aquatic ecosystem preservation, highlighting the threat posed by overfishing exacerbated by climate change. The SR stated that if States fully realize the human rights of small-scale fishers, fish workers and Indigenous Peoples with an emphasis on gender justice, the coastal and riparian communities, will become stronger and food systems more resilient and adaptable in the face of climate change. Regarding the notion of zero hunger, the SR stated that achieving this goal is highly improbable amidst escalating conflicts, worsening climate change impacts, and inadequate international responses to starvation in areas like Gaza, Sudan, and Yemen. The COVID-19 pandemic has further amplified these challenges, particularly affecting women in the fishing industry and exacerbating socio-economic disparities.

The distinction between small-scale fishers and fish workers is crucial, with each group having unique interests and rights. The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries endorsed by the FAO are instrumental in promoting inclusive policy frameworks and safeguarding the rights of small-scale fishing communities, underscoring the importance of participatory decision-making processes and equitable representation. Indigenous Peoples, deeply connected with aquatic environments, face threats to their rights from commodification and overexploitation, with gender disparities persisting within fishing communities, necessitating social protection measures.

There are challenges posed by rights-based approaches in fisheries management, which often narrow rights to economic terms, leaving out social, cultural, and political concerns. Instead, a human rights-based approach should be used to prioritize the dignity and well-being of individuals and communities, ensuring equitable governance structures and recognition of traditional knowledge. This shift is crucial for addressing the complex socio-economic and environmental challenges facing coastal communities and Indigenous Peoples while promoting sustainable fisheries management.

Biologically unsustainable fisheries and climate change pose significant threats to marine ecosystems and coastal communities, exacerbated by extractive industries like offshore oil and gas projects. Despite legal battles and some progress in recognizing small-scale fishers' rights, comprehensive responses are needed to address climate change impacts, including equitable governance structures and recognition of traditional knowledge. However, marginalized communities still face barriers to participation in decision-making processes, perpetuating inequality. The rise of the "blue economy" and "blue finance" concepts signifies a shift towards viewing oceans as economic assets, sidelining human rights and social objectives. Financialization of ocean conservation through instruments like debt-for-nature swaps raises concerns about transparency, accountability, and equity, stressing the need for a holistic approach integrating economic, environmental, and human rights considerations in ocean governance to ensure long-term sustainability and equitable development.

Interactive dialogue

65 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. Global concerns regarding food insecurity and malnutrition, worsened by climate change and conflicts, have been widely acknowledged by **most countries**. They recognized these challenges as stemming from a mix of structural and cyclical factors, urging comprehensive solutions backed by innovative national policies and international collaboration. Of particular concern was the dire state of malnutrition in Gaza,

emphasizing the necessity for collaborative efforts to develop sustainable food systems and tackle the underlying causes of global hunger, such as poverty, inequality, and conflicts.

The **European Union** highlighted the importance of supporting sustainable fisheries and recognized the key role Indigenous peoples have as custodians and defenders of sustainable land management. They proposed that this matter be addressed at the upcoming UN Ocean Conference, aiming for tangible outcomes that align with both Sustainable Development Goals related to the marine environment and zero hunger. **Iceland** (on behalf of the Nordic Baltic Group) recognized that sustainable management of fisheries is not a choice but a fundamental prerequisite to the right to food. **Spain, Mauritius, Malaysia, Uganda, and Eritrea** emphasized the pivotal role of women in fisheries and called for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment within coastal communities. **Gambia** (on behalf of the African group) underscored that the global blue economy's emphasis on commerce over small-scale fishing exacerbates climate change effects, maritime insecurity, and trade decline, thus posing significant threats to food security.

Viet Nam emphasized the significance of the fishery sector within ASEAN's economic integration efforts, stressing its vital role in ensuring food security and supporting livelihoods. They accentuated policy initiatives aimed at bolstering small-scale fisheries, enhancing resilience to climate change, and ensuring access to finance for long-term sustainability and food security in the region. **Barbados** (on behalf of the CARICOM group) promoted financial stability, continued support for initiatives like the Bridge Town initiative, and urged quick finalization of the WTO fishery subsidies agreement to protect vulnerable fisher folk and workers.

Representatives from **Egypt** (on behalf of the Arab Group), along with **Iran, Kuwait, Pakistan, Jordan, Iraq, Zimbabwe, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Cuba, Bangladesh, Algeria, Turkey, Syria** and **Sierra Leone**, underlined the imperative of supporting food sovereignty for the Palestinian people. They called for an immediate ceasefire and the urgent provision of humanitarian assistance.

Georgia highlighted that Russia's occupation of Georgian regions hampers food security, worsening socioeconomic conditions for the affected populations. **Ukraine** underscored that Russian occupation of Crimea since 2014 has severely impacted indigenous communities, leading to environmental degradation and denying rights to small-scale fishers and indigenous peoples in Ukraine's exclusive economic zone, posing threats to regional ecosystems and global food security.

Colombia accentuated the regional efforts for zero hunger through sustainable fisheries and community support. **China** noted the importance of fisheries for global food security and coastal communities while expressing its commitment to combat illegal fishing and promote sustainable resource utilization. China sought to foster mutual benefit and respect in international cooperation efforts. **Yemen** highlighted the impact of Houthi militia activities on its fisheries, preventing fishers from working due to escalated conflicts in regional and international waters. This undermines food availability, exacerbating hunger among Yemeni citizens, with humanitarian aid seized and the Red Sea militarized, further worsening the situation.

Palestine condemned the continued exploitation of oceans and rivers by states and corporations, especially in occupied Gaza, where Israel's assault exacerbates starvation and destroys the food system. Addressing statements from various delegations, **Israel** denied allegations of using starvation as a weapon of war and refuted claims of targeting humanitarian aid in Gaza. They asserted intentions to ensure the well-being of Palestinians.

NGOs outlined the severe impact of climate change on communities reliant on aquatic resources, jeopardizing indigenous diets and livelihoods. Despite international human rights recognition, fisher peoples endure ongoing exclusion, especially amidst initiatives like the blue economy, prompting calls for states to safeguard their rights and reject marginalizing agendas. Additionally, there is global

apprehension regarding the effects of population growth, climate change, and conflicts on water and food security. NGOs urged states to prioritize decisions that uphold life, ecosystems, and diverse ethnic cultures, emphasizing the vital role of oceans in sustaining communities worldwide.

Commission National Indépendante des droits de l'homme of Burundi addressed persistent malnutrition cases in rural areas and shortages of food stocks in penitentiary institutions, urging concerted efforts to promote socioeconomic development and ensure food security for citizens. **The Center for International Environmental Law** asserted that offshore oil and gas projects pose a threat to the human rights of small-scale fishing communities and exacerbate climate change. They advocated for ending offshore oil and gas activity to protect marine ecosystems and prioritize renewable energy sources to safeguard both human rights and ecological integrity.

The representative from the **Centre Europe Tiers Monde** and the **International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations** emphasized the critical impact of Israeli occupation on food insecurity, urging action to end genocide through starvation in Gaza. The **International Eurasia Press Fund** underscored that Azerbaijan confronts an urgent challenge intensified by climate change, exacerbated by deliberate toxic waste discharge from Armenia. The **League of Morocco** advocated for addressing poverty and ignorance in the third millennium while highlighting the need for international support for countries like Libya, facing internal strife and neighbouring nations such as Sudan and Niger grappling with refugee crises.

FAO reaffirmed its commitment to aiding interested members in implementing voluntary guidelines for ensuring sustainable small-scale fisheries, within the context of food security, poverty eradication, and a human rights approach. The **WFP** tinted the critical situation with 300 million people facing acute food insecurity in 72 countries, urging urgent action to prevent further escalation into catastrophic famine-like conditions.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (65 country delegations):

European Union, Iceland (on behalf of a group of countries), Gambia (on behalf of the African Group), Viet Nam (on behalf of ASEAN), Barbados (on behalf of a group of countries), Egypt (on behalf of the Arab Group), Iran (on behalf of a group of countries), Portugal, Costa Rica, Saudi Arabia, Italy, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Pakistan, Germany, Georgia, Sovereign Order of Malta, France, United States of America, Jordan, Armenia, Cameroon, Malawi, Colombia, Iraq, Morocco, Russian Federation, Togo, Maldives, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Cyprus, Peru, Cuba, Viet Nam, Ghana, Malaysia, Spain, Mauritius, Paraguay, China, Iran, Brazil, Bangladesh, Sierra Leone, Yemen, State of Palestine, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Uganda, Sudan, Eritrea, Angola, Algeria, Honduras, Ukraine, India, Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominican Republic, Türkiye, Syrian Arab Republic, Egypt.

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (11):

Commission National Independent of Burundi, Center for International Environmental Law, Bachehaye Asemame Kamran Rehabilitation Institute, World Vision, Centre Europe Tiers Monde, FIAN International, International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations, International Eurasia Press Fund, Rajasthan Samgrah Kalyan Sansthan, India Water, Ligue Marocaine de la Citoyenneté et des Droits de l'homme.

International organizations: FAO, WFP

To watch the full meeting refer to the [UN WEB TV](#).