

# NOBEL PEACE PRIZE TO WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME RECOGNISES HUNGER AS VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Poverty & Hunger and related issues

In May 2018, a remarkable addition was made to the UN Security Council resolutions on civilian protection in armed conflicts. Building on previous UN resolutions on humanitarian laws, human rights and protecting civilians and vulnerable populations, Resolution 2417, for the first time, recognised the need to “break the vicious cycle between armed conflict and food insecurity”. This pathbreaking resolution also added credence to the Sustainable Development Goal of eradicating hunger adopted by the UN in 2015.

The recent announcement of the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize to the World Food Programme (WFP), one of the largest humanitarian organisations addressing hunger and promoting food security, is a step forward in recognising the seriousness of the global food crisis. It draws attention to the sustained efforts to fight hunger and famine from the grassroots to the highest levels of global governance. While recognising those who struggle to ban nuclear weapons, restrict arms production and arms trade, and prevent conflict through diplomacy may seem directly relevant for the peace prize, putting focus on the consequences of war is also an important part of working towards peace and the well-being of people.

UNSCR 2417 had very clearly prepared the ground to focus world attention on the after-effects of war, including continued suffering of food-insecure people and severely undernourished children. The Nobel committee has further stressed the link between armed conflict and hunger — something that the WFP also recently reminded us of. Almost 80 per cent of all chronic malnourished children inhabit countries affected by armed conflict. The ongoing [coronavirus pandemic](#) has exacerbated the problem of food insecurity and famines. It is anticipated that the number of hungry people could increase to 270 million under the impact of the pandemic, with the most acute suffering and starvation experienced in conflict zones.

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Wars constrain people’s mobility, create black markets and restrict people’s access to food, making it either unavailable or too expensive. War-related displacement causes people to be removed from their cultivable land so that they cannot grow food, and it diverts resources from people’s welfare towards the war effort. War parties control what goes in and out of areas under their jurisdiction, and can use withholding of food as a weapon of war. Providing people with food in an emergency situation may seem like a very short-term measure. At the same time, providing for basic needs is necessary for promoting trust in society and for the focus to shift to education, work and rebuilding lives. This is also important for preventing the outbreak of new hostilities and armed conflicts.

Apart from the significance of the connections between war and hunger, we also believe that eradicating hunger needs to be a focus in its own right. Amidst all the media attention to the exceptional violence of wars, terrorism and genocides, we tend to forget the millions of hunger victims who die in a slower, less spectacular form of violence. Hunger is not inevitable: It is man-made and there are victims and perpetrators. Those perpetrators include — but are not restricted to — state actors who, through what they do or what they fail to do, contribute to starvation.

Hunger has been India's bane in colonial times and also since Independence. While debates about the Bengal and other British-era famines are getting some attention now, we need to focus on the hunger threats and food insecurity that independent India continues to face. In 1947, India's biggest challenge was to find enough grains to feed its population of around 300 million, when only 10 per cent of the cultivated area had access to irrigation, and mineral fertilisers were an unaffordable luxury. Though a modern, technology-driven economy was introduced, the lack of domestic food production continued to be supplemented by importing grains from all over the world — an embarrassing situation for a proudly non-aligned nation that became the largest importer of food aid, especially from the US.

The Green Revolution changed the situation drastically since the late 1960s but acute hunger crisis, famines and malnourishment are reported regularly, along with farmer suicides. State policies and accountability are the bigger part of the problem, along with the occurrence of frequent natural disasters and lack of public attention to this issue. The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has further exacerbated the threat of hunger, ever since the lockdown was introduced and millions of daily-wage earners lost their livelihood, giving rise to massive reverse migration. To add to these known precarities, the impact of climate change on the future of crop production is not even fully known yet.

**READ | [Nobel Peace Prize winner WFP's India link: PDS reforms, rice ATMs](#)**

The World Food Programme has delivered food aid and worked to alleviate hunger in many parts of the world, including India. Recognising its work at this critical juncture is not only a much-needed act of appreciation, but an urgent warning that we all need to heed. The world faces a severe food crisis as the threat of famines and starvation is magnified during the ongoing pandemic. This slow violence on vulnerable populations will weigh on our collective conscience, if we do not recognise hunger as the ultimate violation of basic human rights and dignity, and join hands to eradicate it.

***This article first appeared in the print edition on October 13 under the title "A prize for waging war on hunger". Parashar is Associate Professor in Peace and Development Research at the School of Global Studies, Gothenburg University, Sweden. Orjuela is Professor in Peace and Development Research at the School of Global Studies, Gothenburg University, Sweden***

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