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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Arab European Forum for Dialogue and Human Rights, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[10 May 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



The impact of the Ukrainian crisis and climate change on the right to food in the Middle East

Global food security is surrounded by a number of challenges, especially in developing countries, as a negative side effects of the acceleration of the pace of uncontrolled urbanization and the phenomenon of building on agricultural lands in the countries of the South, which affects the sustainability of agricultural activity and the effectiveness of the food system. In addition to the increase in population growth rates, the rapid climate change and the repercussions of the Corona pandemic with all that it has resulted in including the confusion of agricultural activities, the disruption of supply chains, the high shipping costs and the disruption of energy supplies. As a result of these combined disturbances, food prices are raised in 2021 by about 30%, compared to the previous year, achieving their highest level in ten years.

According to United Nations estimates, the area of moderate or severe food insecurity at the global level has increased during the past six years, thus nearly 820 million people were victims of hunger in 2020, while it is stalking one out of every three. After increasing by 18% over the past year, recording the highest rate in nearly two decades, the outbreak of global hunger threatens to undermine the United Nations strategy to end it by 2030.

The risks to the right to food have increased following the ignition of the Ukrainian crisis, as experts expect the increase of the global fertilizers crisis, sparked by the energy crisis, export restrictions, and trade sanctions, which intensified the heavy burdens that have weighed on Russian and Ukrainian farmers for years.

The Middle East region has been struggling for long with a torrent of structural challenges to its food security, due to the high rates of population growth, the spread of corruption, the erosion of the natural resource base, especially fresh water and arable lands, as well as the repercussions of climate change and the growing dependence on the countries abroad in providing nutritional needs.

The Middle East has recorded alarming rates of malnutrition, due to nutrient deficiencies, renewed conflicts and chronic crises. A number of countries in the region, especially Egypt and Turkey, which are the leading importers of wheat globally, are anxiously awaiting the consequences of the Ukrainian crisis in order to fill the frightening gap between consumption and local production.

The explosion of the situation in Eastern Europe, with the ensuing harsh and various sanctions on the Russian Federation, would lead to a rise in energy and food prices globally, as Ukraine and the Russian Federation are at the forefront of the exporting countries of wheat, corn and sunflower oil. They combined produce 206.9 million megatons of grain, making up a third of the world's wheat and barley shipments. After wheat prices jumped last year by at least 45%, due to the Corona pandemic, they continued to rise again during the past two months, reaching their highest level since July 2014, due to the escalation of tensions between the Russian Federation and the West over Ukraine. Last January, the index of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations "FAO" recorded the highest rate of monthly increase, by 6.8%. This is what the organization attributed to the rising global demand.

The World Food Program has warned of the repercussions of the war in Ukraine, as “the disruption of the flow of grain from the Black Sea region will lead to increased and inflated prices, at a time when affordability is a concern worldwide, after the economic damage caused by the (Corona) pandemic.”

The war temporarily suspended a quarter of the global wheat trade, and about 20 percent of the corn trade, which made global crop prices rise to record levels, while Arab countries rely heavily on wheat produced in the Black Sea region, due to its low prices and ease of transportation. For example, Russian wheat represents 60 percent of wheat imports in Tunisia and 80 percent in Egypt, while most of the wheat imported to Lebanon and Morocco comes from Ukraine. On average, the Russian Federation and Ukraine provide 60 percent of the wheat supplied to Arab countries, which makes the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine a threat to their food security, especially under the pressure of drought in countries such as Iraq, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

According to the United Nations, global food prices reached its highest levels in March 2022 as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and are expected to continue rising globally.

The current conflict is disrupting the supply chains of cereals and oilseeds, increasing food prices, and is expected to significantly increase the costs of local production in the agricultural sector. The share of the Russian Federation and Ukraine in the world trade of wheat exceeds 30%, 32% of barley, 17% of corn, and more than half of sunflowers, seeds and animal feed.

Millions of people in the Middle East and North Africa region suffered from the severe effects of hunger and malnutrition long before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, disrupting supply chains and causing a contraction in public spending. The war in Ukraine is currently exacerbating the problem of food insecurity.

According to the World Bank, the share of the Middle East and North Africa region in the total acute food insecurity in the world reached 20% in 2020, which is very high when considering that the region contains only 6% of the world's population.

With millions of people still living in extreme poverty in this region which faces the world's highest inequality, any rise in food prices is likely to have catastrophic effects.

As the latest IPCC report shows, the Middle East and North Africa region is one of the most climate-affected places around the world as the Middle East and North Africa region mainly suffers from environmental stresses such as water scarcity, declining soil fertility, biodiversity and marine life. Communities in the region are suffering from deteriorating food and water security as a result of climate change, and according to United Nations estimates, the number of people who need food assistance in Yemen may reach 19 million in the second half of 2022.

The war in Ukraine has exposed - just as the COVID-19 pandemic did before that - the fragility of the current food system and its heavy dependence on chemical inputs produced by fossil fuels and on global commodity trade, highlighting the need for a local, diverse and more adaptable food system.

From a purely economic perspective, FAO studies do not rule out that high rates of malnutrition will lead to a decline in global GDP by 5%. Also, the absence of stable and long-term food security may lead to a erosion of human capital and an increase in financial burdens on governments, to the extent that it overburdens public government spending and causes stagnation in economic growth in the long run.

The war in Ukraine made it necessary to reconsider our agricultural methods and the foods we eat. The Russian-Ukrainian war exposed the deficiencies in the food system and the commodification-based industrial agriculture, which is an unhealthy global food system that suffers under the pressure of unsustainable food patterns for the affluent class and the effects of climate change, loss of biodiversity, and the decline of soil fertility as a result of the excessive use of agrochemicals.

Therefore, it is necessary to move towards a sustainable food system based on food sovereignty and agroecology to ensure the health of people and the planet.

Southern societies and governments can stop the cycle of neocolonial dependency by adopting alternative paths of development that prioritize people over corporate profits and ensure community ownership and the equitable distribution of assets such as seeds, land, and tools. Any sustainable approach must include adaptation to global warming and be based on human rights.

Most countries in the world should take the initiative to participate in the negotiations concerning the effects of climate change. This includes preparing mitigation and adaptation plans, and in particular ensuring that rich polluters fulfill their obligations by compensating for the devastating effects and damages caused by the climate crisis.

The right to food is facing severe crisis in the Middle East due to the Ukrainian crisis and climate changes. It needs urgent international action to ensure rapid plans and international cooperation that will enable the countries of the region to build more inclusive and sustainable economies, to take measures that allow improving the rules of international trade

in the fields of food and agriculture, to enhance production efficiency and to develop more equitable food and agricultural systems capable of achieving sustainable development goals.

Arab Network for Digital Media and Human Rights, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.